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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Criticism is no isolated thing; it is not an amusement of elegant triflers; it is not—as many people think—a sport of aloof academicians. It is as present as the air, as concrete as bread, and far more necessary to human civilization than steam or petrol. The proverbial Philistine who refuses to see a play that will not make him laugh practices criticism of the most formidable kind and reveals in that practice all he is. For consider the implications of his critical reaction: the utter lack of humane sympathies, the stubborn defiance of all gentler influences, the hard determination to give no part of his earnings for anything that neither stirs his senses nor flatters his consciousness of superiority. Consider, furthermore, the forces in his civilization that have made him what he is: the insistence on mechanical values, the steely ferocities of business competition, the militant subordination of all the elements of life to one coarse and impoverishing kind of success. I could go further and point out how this Philistine's lack of a subtle shame in his attitude, indeed his brazen pride in it, demonstrates the failure on the part of the intellectuals of his age and country to create a cultural atmosphere in which he would be forced, despite himself, into an uneasy awareness of the poverty of his own soul. And I could proceed to an analysis of the impotence of these intellectuals. Or else, I could select another critical reaction of our average business man: his moral indignation over a literary or dramatic treatment of sex, and I could readily derive that from his own furtive grossness or embittered self-repression. . . . But it is already clear that the humblest critical remark made by a random man or woman in any crowd you please has implications that can sear the soul or cry to heaven. . . .

It follows, does it not, that the professional critic deals

constantly with the deepest forces that govern the life of man? He is in daily contact with men's notions of those fundamental values that determine their selection and shaping of the stuff of life into the structures of art; he is in contact with the infinitely varying moods that the world evokes in the soul, and with the flaming apparition of beauty in its myriad forms. And by virtue of his self-appointed office he is a guide, a universal guide, through the mazes of art and life. It is no wonder that the average critic, who is either a teacher or a reviewer, shrinks from his true business, and devotes himself to formal studies in literary history, rhetorical trifling, or the expression of the average tribal reaction to new books and plays. The ordinary college classroom, the ordinary literary page of the newspapers, illustrates these two typical evasions of the critic's function. And in both cases the evasion is loudly or tacitly justified by the staggering assumption that literature is but an elegant diversion—like tennis or motor-boating—that "Job" and "Faust," Shelley's verse or Flaubert's prose are less closely interwoven with the very texture of our lives than the words of the man who preaches in some conventicle around the corner, or the mouthing of some politician across the street. . . . The average man knows better. He suspects that literature is a thing of blood and tears. That is why he avoids it. Life has become very easy for him to-day. Religion has lost its power: the social ideals have not yet achieved theirs. He can make money and spend it and disregard his soul. So long as he can avoid art he can drift on in his comfortable emptiness and sloth. And the teachers and reviewers fall in with his mood and either embalm formal investigations in technical journals or tell him, in the papers and periodicals, that Booth Tarkington is an interpreter of human life and O. Henry a master. . . .

We have critics who conceive more nobly and severely of their calling. Among the older group of them it is necessary to point out only Mr. Paul Elmer More. He is a scholar of high and fine accomplishment. He not only knows but with a cold passion proclaims his knowledge of the oneness of literature and life and of the deep sources

of the critic's aims and works. Unfortunately for the solidity of his fame and the extent of his influence, Mr. More has an icy and cosmic arrogance which, by its antecedent assumptions, invalidates his whole critical thought. Undaunted by history or science, unsubdued by the surgings of the "cosmic weather," calmly oblivious of the crumbling of every absolute ever invented by man, he continues in his fierce and growing isolation to assert that he knows what human life ought to be and what kinds of literature ought to be permitted to express its character. That a form of art or life exists and that it engages the whole hearts of men makes little difference to him. He knows. . . . And what does he know? Only, at bottom, his own temperamental tastes and impulses which he seeks to rationalize by an appeal to carefully selected and isolated tendencies in art and thought. And, having rationalized them by an artifice so fragile, he seeks to impose them upon the men and the artists of his own day in the form of laws. I know his reply so well. It is this, that if you abandon his method, you sink into universal scepticism and indiscriminate acceptance. The truth is that I believe far more than he does. For I love beauty in all its forms and find life tragic and worthy of my sympathy in every manifestation. I need no hierarchical moral world for my dwelling-place, because I desire neither to judge nor to condemn. Fixed standards are useless to him whose central passion is to have men free. Mr. More needs them for the same inner reason—infinitely rarified and refined, of course—for which they are necessary to the inquisitor and the militant patriot. He wants to damn heretics . . . I do not. His last refuge, like that of every absolutist at bay, would be in the corporate judgment of mankind. Yes, mankind has let the authoritarians impose on it only too often. But their day is nearly over. And I need not stop to show how flimsy a fiction that corporate judgment is, so soon as any reasonable interpretation is given to the word judgment. Anatole France and Jules Lemaître did that years ago (*vide infra*) with a blending of delicacy and severity which I could not hope to emulate.

But we are not left, most fortunately, wholly to the mercy

of Mr. More's and Professor Irving Babbit's and Professor Stuart P. Sherman's vision of a static universe with themselves in the inner shrine determining the eternal fixities that they promulgate. A group of critics, young men or men who do not grow old, are at work upon the creation of a civilized cultural atmosphere in America. Their circle of readers is still small and their influence limited. Every man's hand is against theirs. Like a troup of shivering young Davids—slim and frail but with a glint of morning sunshine on their foreheads—they face an army of Goliaths. One of them, the admirable Randolph Bourne, has already fallen. But enough are left and others are certain to arise. The purpose of this book is to furnish them with stones for their slings. . . .

For this collection of modern critical passages will give the liberal critics of America—whose knowledge is not always equal to the energy and freedom of their minds—documentary evidence of three facts of the first importance: Firstly, that their battle was fought and won in France thirty years ago; secondly, that in Germany, where the heritage of Goethe's supreme vision made the battle needless, a complete philosophical basis for the new criticism has been provided; thirdly, and more obviously, that the chief creative minds of contemporary England and Ireland are fighting with them. And that documentary evidence will not only, as I hope, hearten this school of critics, but by its dissemination will increase their audience and ease the conflict in which they are engaged. It is for their sake and for the sake of those finer and freer influences so often balked and silenced among us that I would have this little book reach, sooner or later, the mind of every student and teacher of literature, the mind of every reviewer of books and plays in America.

LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

New York,
August, 1919.

NOTE

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L. L.

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PART ONE

ANATOLE FRANCE

I

THE ADVENTURES OF THE SOUL

As I understand criticism it is, like philosophy and history, a kind of novel for the use of discreet and curious minds. And every novel, rightly understood, is an autobiography. The good critic is he who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces.

There is no such thing as objective criticism any more than there is objective art, and all who flatter themselves that they put aught but themselves into their work are dupes of the most fallacious illusion. The truth is that one never gets out of oneself. That is one of our greatest miseries. What would we not give to see, if but for a minute, the sky and the earth with the many-facetted eye of a fly, or to understand nature with the rude and simple brain of an ape? But just that is forbidden us. We cannot, like Tiresias, be men and remember having been women. We are locked into our persons as into a lasting prison. The best we can do, it seems to me, is gracefully to recognize this terrible situation and to admit that we speak of ourselves every time that we have not the strength to be silent.

To be quite frank, the critic ought to say:

"Gentlemen, I am going to talk about myself on the subject of Shakespeare, or Racine, or Pascal, or Goethe—subjects that offer me a beautiful opportunity."

I had the honor of knowing M. Cuvillier-Fleury, who was a very earnest old critic. One day when I had come to see him in his little house in the Avenue Raphael, he showed me the modest library of which he was proud.

"Sir," he said to me, "oratory, pure literature, philosophy, history, all the kinds are represented here, without counting

criticism which embraces them all. Yes, the critic is by turn orator, philosopher, historian."

M. Cuvillier-Fleury was right. The critic is all that or, at least, he ought to be. He has occasion to show the rarest, most diverse, most varied faculties of the intellect. And when he is a Sainte-Beuve, a Taine, a Jules Lemaître, a Ferdinand Brunetière, he does not fail to do so. Remaining definitely within himself he creates the intellectual history of man. Criticism is the youngest of all the literary forms: it will perhaps end by absorbing all the others. It is admirably suited to a very civilized society with rich memories and long traditions. It is particularly appropriate to a curious, learned and polite humanity. For its prosperity it demands more culture than any of the other literary forms. Its creators were Montaigne, Saint-Evremond, Bayle, Montesquieu. It proceeds simultaneously from philosophy and history. It has required, for its development, an epoch of absolute intellectual liberty. It has replaced theology and, if one were to seek the universal doctor, the Saint Thomas Aquinas of the nineteenth century, of whom would one be forced to think but of Sainte-Beuve? . . .

According to Littré a book is a bound bundle of paper sheets whether hand-written or printed. That definition does not satisfy me. I would define a book as a work of magic whence escape all kinds of images to trouble the souls and change the hearts of men. Or, better still, a book is a little magic apparatus which transports us among the images of the past or amidst supernatural shades. Those who read many books are like the eaters of hashish. They live in a dream. The subtle poison that penetrates their brain renders them insensible to the real world and makes them the prey of terrible or delightful phantoms. Books are the opium of the Occident. They devour us. A day is coming on which we shall all be keepers of libraries, and that will be the end.

Let us love books as the mistress of the poet loved her grief. Let us love them: they cost us dear enough. Yes, books kill us. You may believe me who adore them, who have long given myself to them without reserve. Books

slay us. We have too many of them and too many kinds. Men lived for long ages without reading and precisely in those ages their actions were greatest and most useful, for it was then that they passed from barbarism to civilization. But because men were then without books they were not bare of poetry and morality: they knew songs by heart and little catechisms. In their childhood old women told them the stories of the Ass's Skin and of Puss in Boots of which, much later, editions for bibliophiles have been made. The earliest books were great rocks covered with inscriptions in an administrative or religious style.

It is a long time since then. What frightful progress we have made in the interval! Books multiplied in a marvellous fashion in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. To-day their production has increased an hundredfold. In Paris alone fifty books are published daily without counting the newspapers. It is a monstrous orgy. We shall emerge from it quite mad. It is man's fate to fall successively into contradictory extremes. In the Middle Ages ignorance bred fear. Thus maladies of the mind reigned then which we no longer know. To-day, through study, we are hastening toward general paralysis. Would it not be wiser and more elegant to keep some measure?

Let us be lovers of books and let us read them: but let us not gather them with indiscriminate hands: let us be delicate: let us choose, and, like that lord in one of Shakespeare's comedies, let us say to our book-seller: "I would that they be well-bound and that they speak of love."

II

THE SACRED GROVES

The kindly influence of the works of the masters inspires wise discourse, grave and familiar speech, wavering images like garlands constantly broken and constantly reknotted, long reveries, a vague and gentle curiosity that clings to all things but would exhaust none, the memory of what was dear, the forgetfulness of ugly cares and the return to one's

own soul. When we read, then, these excellent books, these books of life, we cause them to pass into ourselves. The critic must be thoroughly penetrated by the knowledge that every book exists in as many different forms as it has readers and that a poem, like a landscape, becomes transformed for every eye that sees it, for every soul that apprehends it.

Some years ago, when I was passing fair days under the pines of Hohwald, I was astonished, during my long rambles, to come upon a bench at every point where the shade was most grateful, the view most extensive, nature most engaging. These rustic benches bore names that betrayed the sentiments of those who had placed them there. One was called Friendship's Meetingplace, another Sophie's Rest, a third Charlotte's Dream.

These good Alsatians who had contrived for their friends and for the passers-by these places of rest and of meeting, taught me what kindness those may practice who have lived in the lands of the spirit and have long travelled there. I, for my part, determined to go about placing rustic seats in the sacred groves and near the fountains of the Muses. That modest and pious woodman's task suits me marvellously. It requires neither learning nor system and asks only an exquisite astonishment before the beauty of things. Let the village sage, let the surveyor measure the roads and place the mile-stones. As for me, the kindly care of places of rest and meeting and of dreams shall busy me enough. Fit for my tastes and adjusted to my strength is that task of criticism which is lovingly to place benches in beautiful spots and to say with Anytas of Tegaeus:

"Whoever thou art, come and sit in the shade of this beautiful laurel tree that we may here sing praises to the immortal gods!"

III

THE GUARDED SECRETS

M. Ferdinand Brunetière, of whom I am very fond, has a great quarrel with me. He reproaches me with mis-

understanding the very laws of criticism, with having no criterion by which to judge the things of the mind, with floating amid contradictions with no guide but my instincts, with never getting out of myself, with being enclosed within my subjectivity as in a dark prison. Far from complaining at being thus attacked, I rejoice in this honorable dispute, every circumstance of which flatters me: the merit of my opponent, the severity of a censure which yet hides so much indulgence, the greatness of the interests involved. For, according to M. Brunetière, there is at stake nothing less than the intellectual future of our country. . . .

I have many disadvantages if I must necessarily contend with M. Brunetière. I shall not point out the inequalities so certain as to be obvious at once. I shall merely indicate one of a very special nature. It is this, that while he finds my criticism vexatious, I find his excellent. I am thus reduced to that defensive position which all tacticians consider bad. I hold the powerful critical structures of M. Brunetière in very high esteem. I admire the solidity of their materials and the greatness of their plan. I have just read the discourses delivered at the *École normale* by this most able lecturer on the Evolution of Criticism from the Renaissance to Our Days, and I feel no displeasure in proclaiming that his ideas are conducted with much method, marshalled in an order that is most happy, impressive and new. Their march, heavy but sure, recalls the famous manœuvre of the legionaries, who advanced in closely serried ranks under protection of their shields to the assault of a city. That was the famous *testudo* formation, and it was a formidable one. A little surprise is mixed, perhaps, with my admiration when I see whither that army of ideas is bound. M. Ferdinand Brunetière plans to apply to literary criticism the theories of evolution. And, if this enterprise seems interesting and praiseworthy in itself, yet one has not forgotten the energy recently expended by this critic in the cause of subordinating science to morals and of weakening the authority of every doctrine founded on the natural sciences. . . . I do not at all affirm that M. Brunetière belies his own convictions or contradicts himself. I mark a trait

of his nature, a turn of his character which is, with a great deal of consistency, to fall voluntarily into the unexpected and the unforeseen. It was said, one day, that he was paradoxical, and that saying seemed an ironical one, so solidly established was his reputation as a good reasoner. But one has come to see on reflection that he is, in fact, a trifle paradoxical in his manner. His ability in proving things is prodigious: he must always be proving something, and he is fond, at times, of powerfully supporting extraordinary and even stultifying opinions.

By what cruel fate am I doomed to admire a critic who corresponds so little to my sentiments! For M. Ferdinand Brunetiére there are simply two kinds of critical methods: the subjective, which is bad, and the objective, which is good. According to him, M. Jules Lemaître, M. Paul Desjardins and myself—we are tainted with subjectivity, and that is the worst of evils: for from subjectivity one falls into illusion, into sensuality and into lust, and judges the works of man by the pleasure that they give one, which is an abominable thing. For one must not be pleased with some product of the mind until one knows whether one is right in being so pleased; for man is, above all, a rational animal and he must first use his reason; hence it is necessary to be right and it is not necessary to find pleasure; for it is the attribute of man to seek to instruct himself by the methods of logic, which are infallible; hence one ought always to put a truth at the end of a chain of reasoning, like a knot at the end of a plait; for without that, the reasoning will not keep from unravelling, and it must keep from unravelling; and thereupon one joins together several strands of reasoning in such a way as to form an indestructible system—which lasts a dozen years. And that is why objective criticism is the only good criticism.

M. Ferdinand Brunetière holds the other method to be fallacious and deceptive. And he gives various reasons. But I am forced, first of all, to produce the incriminating text. It is a passage in my *Vie littéraire* which reads as follows:

"There is no such thing as objective criticism any more than there is objective art, and all who flatter themselves

that they put aught but themselves into their work are dupes of the most fallacious illusion. The truth is that one never gets out of oneself. That is one of our greatest miseries. What would we not give to see, if but for a minute, the sky and the earth with the many-facetted eye of a fly, or to understand nature with the rude and simple brain of an ape? But just that is forbidden us. We cannot, like Tiresias, be men and remember having been women. We are locked into our persons as into a lasting prison. The best we can do, it seems to me, is gracefully to recognize this terrible situation and to admit that we speak of ourselves every time that we have not the strength to be silent."

M. Brunetière, having quoted these lines, remarks at once "that one cannot affirm with greater assurance that nothing is sure." I could easily answer that no contradiction is involved, since there is no novelty in asserting that we are fated to know things only by the impressions which they make on us. That is a truth which observation can establish and so striking a one that it reaches everyone. It is a commonplace of philosophy. One need not fix one's attention on it too closely, and above all one need not see in it a doctrinal pyrrhonism. I confess that I have more than once glanced sidewise at absolute scepticism. But I have never entered that region; I have been afraid to put my foot on that foundation which engulfs everything one entrusts to it. I have feared the formidable sterility of those two words: "I doubt." Such is their force that the lips which have once advisedly uttered them are forever sealed and can never more be opened. If one doubts, one must be silent; for whatever discourse one may hold, to speak is in itself to affirm. And since I have not had the courage of silence and of renunciation, I have desired to believe and I have believed. I have believed at least in the relativity of things and in the succession of phenomena.

In fact, reality and appearance—it is all one. To love and to suffer in this world, images suffice; it is not necessary that their objectivity be demonstrated. In whatever fashion one conceives of life, and though one knows it to be the

dream of a dream—one lives. That is all we need to found sciences, arts, moralities, impressionistic and, if you please, objective criticism. M. Brunetière is of the opinion that one can leave one's inner self and proceed beyond that self as much as one desires, like that old professor of Nürenberg whose surprising adventure M. Josephin Peladan, who is a mage, has recently related. This professor, who was much occupied with aesthetics, nightly left his visible body and proceeded, in his astral body, to compare the legs of the lovely mortal sleepers with those of the Venus of Praxiteles. "The self-deception," M. Brunetière affirms, "if we must assume its existence, is in believing and teaching that we cannot get out of our *ego* when, on the contrary, the whole business of life is precisely that. And the reason for this will undoubtedly seem very strong when we remember that otherwise there would be no such thing as society or language or literature or art." And he adds: "We are men. . . . And we are men, above all, by the power we have of going forth from ourselves in order to seek, to find and to recognize those very selves in others."

That is surely saying a great deal. We are in the cave and we see the phantoms of the cave. Without that life would be too sad. It has no charm and no preciousness save by virtue of the shadows that flit along the sides of the walls within which we are prisoned, shadows that resemble us and that we strive to recognize as they pass and, sometimes, to love.

As a matter of fact, we see the world only through the medium of our senses which shape and color it as they please, and M. Brunetière does not contest the point. He seeks support, on the contrary, in these conditions of our knowledge to found his objective criticism. Considering that the senses bring to all men impressions of nature that are very nearly alike, so that what seems round to one will hardly seem square to another, and that the sense of hearing functions in the same way if not in the same degree in all minds, he derives from these facts what we call common sense, and founds his criticism on this universal agreement. He is not himself without the perception that it is thus ill-

founded. For this agreement, which suffices to form and preserve societies, does not suffice when it is a question of establishing the superiority of one poet over another. Granted that men are sufficiently alike for each to find in the market places and in the bazaars of a great city what is necessary for his existence. So much is not doubtful. But nothing is less probable than that there should be but two men in one country who feel a Vergilian line in absolutely the same fashion.

In mathematics there is a kind of superior truth which we all accept. But we do so for the very reason that its perception is not through the senses. Physicists, on the other hand, are forced to reckon with what is called the personal equation in all the sciences of observation. A phenomenon is never perceived absolutely alike by any two observers.

M. Brunetière cannot hide from himself the fact that the personal equation disports itself nowhere more freely than in the illusive domains of the arts and of literature.

In that field there is never unanimous agreement or stable opinion. He acknowledges that. Or, at least, begins by acknowledging it. "To omit our contemporaries whom, it is clear, we see in no proper perspective, how many varying judgments have not men, during the past three or four centuries, delivered on a Corneille or a Shakespeare or a Cervantes, a Raphael or a Michel Angelo! Even as there is no opinion so extravagant and absurd but that some philosopher has upheld it, so there is none, however scandalous or hostile to great genius, which does not bear the authority of some critic's name." And to prove that the great men cannot expect any more justice from their peers, he shows us Rabelais insulted by Ronsard and Corneille publicly preferring Boursault to Racine. He ought also to have shown us Lamartine despising La Fontaine; he could also have exhibited Victor Hugo badly misjudging all our classics except Boileau, for whom, in his declining age, he entertained some kindness.

In a word, M. Brunetière admits that there are very many directly conflicting opinions in the republic of letters. It is

in vain that he bethinks himself later and declares with assurance that "it is not true that the opinions are so divergent or the divisions so deep." It is equally in vain that he borrows the authority of an opinion of M. Jules Lemaître to affirm the admission by all lettered men that certain writers *exist*, despite their faults, while others simply do not exist. For instance, Voltaire as a writer of tragic drama exists; Campistron does not, nor the Abbé Leblanc nor M. de Jouy. That is the first point that he wishes one to grant him. But one will hardly do so, for when it came to making out the two lists there would hardly be any common understanding.

The second point to which he clings is that there are degrees which are really grades conferred on genius by faculties of grammarians and in the universities of rhetoricians. Obviously such diplomas might tend a good deal to further order and regularity in the realm of great fame. Unhappily they lose much of their value through human contradictoriness. These licences and doctorates, which M. Brunetière believes universally recognized, impress scarcely anyone but those who confer them.

As a matter of pure theory a critical method is conceivable which, proceeding from science, might share the latter's certainty. It may be that the sentiments we entertain toward the ethics of M. Maurice Barrès or the prosody of Mr. Jean Moréas depend on the idea we hold concerning the forces of the cosmos and the mechanics of the heavens. All things in the universe are inextricably intertwined. In reality, however, the links of the chain are, in any given spot, so jumbled that the devil himself could not disentangle them, even if he were a logician. And in addition, we should gracefully admit that what humanity knows least about is its beginnings. It is the fundamental principles that we lack in all matters and particularly in our knowledge of the products of the mind. One cannot foresee to-day, whatever one may say, a time when criticism will have the rigorousness of a positive science. One may even believe, reasonably enough, that that time will never come. Nevertheless the great philosophers of antiquity crowned their

cosmic systems with a poetics. And they did wisely. For it is better to speak of beautiful thoughts and forms with incertitude than to be forever silent. Few things in the world are so absolutely subject to science that they will let science reproduce or predict them. And one may be sure that a poem or a poet will never be among those few. The things that touch us most nearly, that seem loveliest and most desirable to us, are precisely those that remain ever vague to us and partly mysterious. Beauty, virtue and genius will forever guard their secret. Neither the charm of Cleopatra nor the sweetness of Saint Francis nor the poetry of Racine will ever permit themselves to be reduced to formulæ. If these things sustain a relation to science, it is to one that is blended with art, that is intuitive, restless, forever unfinished. That science or, rather, that art exists. It is philosophy, ethics, history, criticism—in a word, the whole beautiful romance of man.

Every work of poetry or art has been in all ages the subject of disputes, and it is perhaps one of the great charms of beautiful things to remain questionable. And it is vain to deny that they are all, all questionable. M. Brunetière is quite unwilling to admit this universal and fatal incertitude. It is too repugnant to his authoritarian and methodical mind, which would be forever classifying and judging. Let him judge, then, since his temper is so judicial. And let him drive his serried arguments in their terrifying battle array since he is indeed a warrior critic!

But can he not forgive some innocent soul for concerning itself with the things of art with less rigorousness and consistency than he has, and with displaying less use of the reason, above all, of ratiocination? Can he not forgive such an one for keeping in criticism the tone of familiar talk and the light step of a stroll; for stopping where he pleases and, perhaps, indulging in confidences; for following his tastes, his fancies and even his caprice, provided only that he be always veracious, sincere and kindly; for not knowing everything nor explaining everything; for believing in the irremediable diversity of opinions and feelings and for speaking most gladly of that which one must love.

IV

THE DISPUTES OF THE FLUTE-PLAYERS

In aesthetics, that is to say in the clouds, one can argue more and better than in any other subject. It is there that one must be cautious. It is there that one has everything to fear: indifference as well as partiality, coldness as well as passion, knowledge as well as ignorance, artfulness, wit, subtlety and an innocence which is more dangerous than craft. In all matters of aesthetics you must dread sophisms, especially when they are beautiful, and you will find admirable ones. In this field you must not even trust the mathematical mind, which is so perfect and so sublime, but of such delicacy as a mechanism that it cannot work except in the void, because a grain of sand in its wheelwork is enough to make it go wrong. One shudders when one thinks to what length such a grain of sand can drag a mathematical brain. Think of Pascal!

Aesthetics is founded on nothing solid. It is a castle in the air. Men have tried to prop it upon ethics. But there is no ethics. There is no sociology. Nor is there any biology. The completion of the sciences has never existed except in the brain of M. Auguste Comte, whose books are prophetical. When an exact biology will have been established, that is to say in some millions of years, it may perhaps be possible to establish a sociology. That will also take a great number of centuries. Then will come the time when you may properly create an aesthetic science on solid foundations. But by that time our planet will be very old and will approach the term of its destiny. The sun whose spots, not without reason, trouble us even now, will in those days turn to the earth a face of sombre and fuliginous red, half covered by opaque scoriæ, and the last men, taking refuge in the depths of mines, will be less anxious to dispute on the essence of the beautiful than to burn their last fragments of coal before plunging into the eternal ice.

Tradition and unversal agreement have been taken as foundations of criticism. Neither one exists. It is true

that an almost general opinion favors certain works. But it does so by virtue of a prejudice and not at all through choice and the effect of a spontaneous preference. The works which everybody admires are those which no one looks at. One receives them like a precious burden which one hands on to others without looking at it. Do you really believe that there is much freedom of judgment in the approbation which we give to the Greek, the Latin or even the French classics? And is the taste which draws us to a certain contemporary work and away from some other really free? Is it not determined by many circumstances quite alien to the content of the work, the chief of which is the spirit of imitation so powerful both among men and beasts? That spirit of imitation is necessary to us to help us live without too much disorder; we carry it into all our actions and it dominates our aesthetic sense. Without it our opinions in matters of art would be even more diverse than they are. It is in this way that some work which, for some reason or other, has, to begin with, gained the suffrages of some, will thereupon gather those of many. The first alone were free; all the others did nothing but obey. They have neither spontaneity, nor insight, nor courage, nor any character. And their multiplication creates fame. It all depends on a very small beginning. One also observes that works despised at their birth have little chance of pleasing later, and that on the contrary works celebrated from their appearance will long guard their reputation and be respected even after they have become unintelligible. The utter dependence of agreement upon prejudice is proved by the fact that they cease together. Numerous instances of this could be given. . . .

What an interesting book could be written on the variations of criticism concerning one of those works with which men have most busied themselves—Hamlet, the Divine Comedy, the Iliad. The Iliad charms us to-day by a barbarous and primitive character which we discover in it in all good faith. In the seventeenth century Homer was praised for having observed the rules of epic composition.

"You may be sure," Boileau said, "that if Homer used the word 'dog' it is because 'dog' is a noble word in Greek."

Such ideas seem absurd to us. Ours may seem equally absurd in two hundred years. For after all, one cannot rank amid the eternal verities the perception that Homer is primitive and that primitive barbarism is admirable. There is not a single opinion in literature which one cannot easily fight with its precise opposite. Who, then, will be able to end the disputes of the flute-players?

—*La vie litteraire.*

JULES LEMAITRE

I

THE CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARIES

I RECALL an old article of M. Étienne on the "Contemplations" and a study of M. Saint-Réné Taillandier on the "Tentation de Saint Antoine" which, at that happy age when one lacks discretion, used to fill me with the most furious indignation. M. Étienne reproached Victor Hugo from end to end with obscurity, preposterousness, bad taste. M. Taillandier, conscientiously examining Flaubert's "piece of folly," found in it no clearness, no understanding of history, no good sense, no decency, no moral insight, no ideal. Both of them were right. But, since I was very young, I said to myself: "Ah, my good and emminent professors, good taste, good sense, good order, morality, the ideal—any other decent man of letters could have put those into a book! I could do that much myself if I desired to! But the radiance, the sonorousness, the abounding lyricism, the brilliant profusion of images in the "Contemplations," and the strangeness and plastic perfection of the "Tentation"—these are the things of which Hugo and Flaubert alone were capable. It would have been better had they added good taste and good sense; but, after all, I do not attach so high an importance to what I might possess or acquire like any other. Where only that is lacking which you or I might have furnished, I am not tempted to make so loud a demand. These common qualities may, indeed, contribute to the perfection of a work. But by themselves they cut a poor figure while, on the contrary, a powerful originality has its independent value and sweeps us off our feet or charms us even without them."

No doubt I went too far. There are necessary rules the breach of which prevents a book from attaining its highest possible value, although the interpretation of these rules may differ widely in rigor. But I was perhaps right in my admiration, in spite of all, and in my belief that the true beauty of a book is something intimate and profound, which can not be hurt even by breaches of the rules of rhetoric or of convention; that the worth of a writer is above all in a way of seeing, of feeling and of speaking which is his very own and which raises him above the common level. I do not say, of course, that the means do not matter or that a facile and conscious singularity will suffice.

But one must love a thing to understand it well and thoroughly. There are several writers of our time, however, rare and interesting ones, whom M. Brunetière does not love. And he does not precisely because he does not find in them those indispensable common qualities which M. Étienne demanded of Victor Hugo and which abound in the masters of the seventeenth century. Furthermore he has, I venture to say, a mind too philosophical, too preoccupied with theories to permit it to be frankly engaged by any books but such as to which he is sufficiently instructed and reassured in advance. Since his inclination is to classify, to range authors in groups, to explain the interconnection between books, to raise general questions, this preoccupation deters him from penetrating as deeply as he might into the intelligence and feeling of a new work. His first impulse is to compare it to "the models" and, while he is hastening to judge it, he forgets to enjoy it, to discover what, after all, is its peculiar beauty, and whether the author, despite his faults and prejudices, has not by chance some originality and power, some impressions, some view of things which belonged to him alone and distinguished him. But M. Brunetière will not enter into any souls except those that have been dead two hundred years: he disdains ours. He admits somewhere that in M. Zola's works there are several hundred fine pages: why does he not talk about them a little? But he prefers proving in how many ways the rest are bad. Ah, yes, there is a good deal of useless coarseness in M. Zola,

and his novels are not perhaps as true as he thinks they are. He is not so fine a psychologist as La Rochefoucauld, nor so sure a stylist as Flaubert. What of it? For none the less M. Zola has his own originality, something that differs from anything one finds in Balzac or in Flaubert himself; and it is precisely that quality which it would be useful to define after one has felt it.

In brief, M. Brunetière is an excellent judge of the classics because he loves them. Elsewhere I am often tempted to challenge him, or, at least, to have the impression that one can understand the criticism of one's contemporaries quite differently from him, and in a way that is more just and more prudent at once.

It is perhaps not well to begin by a criticism of their faults. That is often too easy and has the best chance of being quite sterile. Such criticism as leads immediately to general aesthetic considerations is interesting in itself, but it tells us almost nothing concerning the books which are its ostensible objects and may even easily distort them. The criticism which seeks to assign to new books their place in the history of literature and to explain their appearance is often premature. That which classifies them at once is very arrogant and exposes itself to sharp contradictions. Furthermore, these various kinds of criticism may each come at their fit time. But is it not just and necessary to begin, so far as possible without any preconception, with a sympathetic reading of such books, in order to arrive at a definition of what element they contain that is original and belongs strictly to the writer? And that is not so small a matter as one might think, nor so quickly managed.

This does not amount to a simple-minded fiction by which writers are to be assigned at once to the same rank. A sympathetic study must be preceded by a kind of clearing and sorting which takes place quite naturally. It is plain that there are books which are not fit subjects for criticism, which do not rise into the field of artistic being, quite irrespective of the number of editions through which they have passed. On the other hand, omitting a few doubtful cases, one knows very well and it is an established fact among

the truly lettered that certain authors, whatever be their faults or absurdities *exist*, as we say, and are worthy of being regarded closely. The author of "Assommoir" is such an one, even for M. Brunetière, and M. Edmond de Goncourt is another, in spite of all—and more surely the brothers Goncourt come into this class. And equally M. Feuillet, M. Cherbuliez, M. Theuriet. But many of the sub-naturalists and sub-idealists do not.

But all those who are in this class, that is to say all those who, somewhere in their work, produce an aesthetic impression of some power and continuity—these one has unquestionably the right to criticise, but not to treat harshly, and one must, above all, thank them for the pleasure which they have given us. For the beautiful, wherever it is found, and in whatever company, is still the beautiful, and one may say that it is everywhere equal to itself or that, if there be degrees in it, these degrees are essentially variable according to differing temperaments, characters, turns of mind, and according to the day, the hour, the moment. "Germinie Lacerteux," which M. Brunetière treats with so much contempt, is certainly a less perfect and solid book than "Madame Bovary"; but the best pages of "Germinie" have pleased and moved me as much, though in a different fashion, as the story of Emma itself. And I am ready to forgive much to anyone who has once given me this great pleasure. It is doubtless stupid to say to a critic who seems to you unduly harsh to a book you love: "Let us see you write as good a one!" But I should wish him to have said it to himself. I know very well that authors, on their side, have often a quite unintelligent contempt for critics. I have heard a young novelist maintain with less wit than assurance that the least of novelists and playwrights is still superior to the best of critics and historians and that, for instance, a certain purveyor to the "Petit Journal" outweighs M. Taine who does not invent stories. This young man did not even know that there are several sorts of invention. I am not angry with him. It belongs to the character of a good critic to understand more things than a young novelist and to be more indulgent.

Thus it is in a spirit of sympathy and of love that one ought to approach those of our contemporaries who are not beneath criticism. One ought first to analyze the impression which one receives from a book; next one should try to define the author, to describe his "form," to delineate his temperament—what the world means to him and what he seeks in it by preference, what is his feeling toward life, what is the degree of his sensitiveness, finally, how his mind is constituted. Thus one comes to identify oneself so completely with the writer whom one loves that, when he commits grave faults, it gives one pain, genuine pain; but at the same time one sees so clearly why he let himself go in that direction, how his faults are a part of his very self, that they first seem inevitable and almost necessary and soon more than excusable and even amusing. And that is why, though there is much to be said against "Bouvard et Pecuchet," and though the book is frankly bad if judged according to the principles of M. Brunetière, I open it gladly and always read it with pleasure, and here and there with delight. And that is because I find Flaubert in it in the full expansiveness or rather, since he has no such quality, in the extreme contraction of his manias and stubbornnesses as an artist; but I find him there with all his qualities more precise, more drily and stringently defined, than almost anywhere else. And that in itself pleases me. For what, in the last analysis, is interesting in a work of art is the transformation or even the distortion of reality through a mind; it is that mind itself, provided it be a peerless one.

"And what one loves in you, madame, is—you!"

What I love in the most unsuccessful book of Flaubert, is still Flaubert. What pleases me in the severest article of M. Brunetière is M. Brunetière. In ending then, I am careful not to wish him a little indulgence, a little frivolity, a little depravity. He could not but lose thereby. At least it is not absolutely certain that he would gain, while such as he is, and though my perceptions are not his one time in ten, I have no difficulty (if I may be excused for so solemn a formula) in saluting him as a master.

II

PERSONALITY IN CRITICISM

It would seem at first view that the greater a critic's range of mind and power of sympathy are, the fewer are the individual characteristics that he will present to one who desires to define and depict him. The most marked and original, however, not only among men, but among writers, are those who do not understand everything, nor feel everything, nor love everything, but those whose knowledge, intelligence and tastes have definite limitations. The ideal man who will appear at the end of time, since he will know and grasp all things equally well, will doubtless almost wholly lack an intellectual personality; his passions, his vices, even his whims will be quite attenuated. The members of that small philosophical oligarchy which, according to M. Renan, will perhaps some day rule the world, freed from all lower passions as they will be by their omniscience, will surely resemble each other to such an extent that it will be hard to tell them apart. They will approach the character of God, the great knower and critic; and God has no individuality. The writer of to-day who would grasp wholly and profoundly all the modes in which the universe is mirrored in men's minds could hardly be defined except by that aptitude to penetrate and grasp all things itself.

But we have not reached that point yet. In reality there are as many ways of conceiving of criticism as there are conceptions of the novel, the theatre or poetry; the writer's personality may, therefore, be as strongly marked in criticism, if he has one, as in the other kinds. It may merely be necessary sometimes to take a little more pains to disengage it.

It is perfectly obvious (but I need these truisms to regain confidence) that, like every other writer, a critic necessarily puts into his writings his temperament and his conception of life, since it is with his mind that he describes the minds of others; that the differences between M. Taine, M. Nisard

and Sainte-Beuve are as deep as those, let us say, between Corneille, Racine and Molière, and that, in a word, criticism is a representation of the world as personal, as relative, as vain and hence as interesting as those which constitute the other literary kinds.

Criticism varies infinitely according to the object studied, the mind that studies it, the point of view which that mind occupies. It may consider works, men or ideas. It may judge or merely define. Dogmatic at first, it has become historical and scientific; but its evolution does not seem at an end. Vain as doctrine, necessarily incomplete as science, it seems to tend to become simply the art of enjoying books and of enriching and refining one's impressions through them.

M. Nisard begins by forming for himself a general and, so to speak, purified idea of the French genius. This idea he has drawn from a first survey of our literature as a whole. He includes in it, as an integral part, the beliefs of a spiritualistic philosophy. By the ideal thus conceived he measures the works of writers and exalts or abuses them as they approach that ideal more or less nearly. Furthermore, he isolates these works, and usually neglects the personalities of their authors; or, if he speaks of them at all, it is to attribute to them, in the name of free will, the merit or dishonor of having served or betrayed the literary ideal according to his fundamental definition of it. He deliberately fails to seize upon any necessary bond between the works and their producers, or between these and their social environments, or between successive periods. And thus his history unfolds itself according to an inexorable plan, and the French spirit seems, according to him, to resemble a moral personality who developed and then declined in the course of the ages. Thence arises a history that has rigorous unity. It is extremely systematic and singularly partial and incomplete; but how interesting is the mind of M. Nisard, how fine, delicate and disdainful!

M. Taine, in his "History of English Literature," pursues the opposite course and achieves precisely the same result. While M. Nisard considers only the works, M. Taine pre-

tends to consider above all the near or remote causes of which they are the product; and while M. Nisard cuts the works from their roots, M. Taine studies these roots to their last ramifications and even the soil in which they are buried. But this accounting for books by men, and for men by race and environment, is often only a snare. For without saying it, the critic had antecedently, by a first rapid review of English literature, made himself an idea of the English genius (just as M. Nisard did of the French), and thence he deduced the conditions and the environment from which works characteristically English might arise. And all those which the environment does not explain, he affects to leave aside. Thus by another road he arrives at an exclusiveness as narrow as that of M. Nisard. The idealism of the one and the positivism of the other produce in the end an analogous result. And we may say as before: the history of M. Taine is singularly systematic, partial and incomplete; but how interesting is the genius of M. Taine! What power of generalization and at the same time what magic of color there are in the work of this poet logician!

Thus whether dogmatic or scientific, literary criticism is never, in the end of things, anything but the personal and perishable work of one wretched man. Sainte-Beuve blends the two methods with much grace, sometimes appreciates but more often describes, still judges works of art according to tradition, according to classical taste, but prefers in his travels through the whole of literature to apply himself to the drawing of portraits and to moral biographies, and contributes I do not know how many scattered but exquisite fragments to what he so well named the natural history of minds.

I pass over the various combinations of dogma, history and psychology that are characteristic of MM. Scherer, Montégut and Brunetière. But unless I am badly mistaken M. Paul Bourget has imagined a kind of criticism that is almost new. In his hands criticism becomes the story of his own intellectual and moral development. It is what one may call egotistic criticism. His mind being eminently and almost wholly a product of the immediate present (the in-

fluence of the classical tradition is little marked in him), he confines himself to the writers of the past thirty years and chooses among them those with whom he finds his intelligence and his heart most at one. And he neither draws their portraits nor writes their biographies, he neither analyses their books nor studies their methods; he does not define the impression which their works have made on him as works of art: he seeks only to explain and describe clearly those of their states of consciousness and those of their ideas which he has best appropriated to himself through imitation or sympathy. And thus, while in reality writing nothing but the history of his own soul, he gives at the same time a history of the most original sentiments of his generation, and actually composes a considerable and definitive fragment of the moral history of our age.

III

TRADITION AND LOVE

Is it possible that I have failed to reproach M. Weiss with being a wavering and capricious critic and with not having in his pocket an unvarying yard-stick by which to measure the works of the mind? One of Montaigne's favorite thoughts is that we can have no certain knowledge, since nothing is unchangeable, neither things nor minds, and that the spirit and its object are involved with each other in a perpetual maze. Changeful ourselves, we contemplate a world in change. And even when the object observed has been forever arrested in its form, it suffices for the mind wherein it is reflected to be changeable and diverse to make any responsibility impossible except that for the impression of the moment.

How then can literary criticism set up as a doctrine? Works of art defile before the mirror of our minds; but since the line is long, the mirror is modified in the interval and when, by chance, the same work returns, it no longer projects the same image.

Each man may experience that in his own case. Once I

adored Corneille and despised Racine: to-day I adore Racine and Corneille is almost indifferent to me. Once the verses of Musset threw me into raptures; I can find those raptures no more. I have lived with my ears and eyes filled with the music and magic of Victor Hugo; to-day I feel the soul of Victor Hugo to be almost a stranger to mine. I dare not reread the books which ravished me and made me cry at fifteen. When I strive to be sincere and to express what I truly feel, I am appalled to observe how little agreement there is between my impressions and the traditional judgments held on very great writers, and I hesitate to speak all my thought.

It is because that tradition is almost entirely a matter of artifice and convention. One remembers what one has, perhaps, felt oneself, or rather what venerated teachers have declared one should feel. It is never by anything except such docility and such agreement that a body of literary judgments can be formed and can persist. Some minds have enough force and assurance to establish these long sets of judgments and to rest them upon unchangeable principles. These minds are, by will or by nature, less changeful mirrors than the others and, if you please, less inventive, and in them the same works are always reflected in very nearly the same fashion. But one can easily see that they have nothing within them by virtue of which they can impose themselves on other intelligences, and that they contain nothing, in the end, but personal preferences grown rigid.

One judges that to be good which one loves. There is the whole matter. (I am not speaking here of those who think they love what one has declared to them to be good.) Only some always love the same things and think that all men must love them; others who are weaker have more changeable affections and defend these. But whether dogmatic or not, criticism, whatever be its pretensions, can never go beyond defining the impression which, at a given moment, is made on us by a work of art wherein the writer has himself recorded the impression which he received from the world in a certain hour.

Since this is so and since, moreover, all is vanity, let us love the books which delight us without worrying about classifications and doctrines and make a tacit compact with our own minds that our impression of to-day is no pledge of what to-morrow's will be. If a recognized masterpiece shocks me, wounds me, or, what is worse, means nothing to me at all; if, on the other hand, some book of to-day or yesterday, which is not perhaps immortal, stirs me to the very heart, seems to express my whole self and to reveal me to myself as more intelligent than I hoped, am I to think myself at fault and to be distressed? Men of genius are not always quite conscious of themselves and of their work; they have almost always certain simplicities, ignorances, absurdities; they have a coarse facility and spontaneity; they do not know all they do, and do not do it purposefully enough. Above all, in this age of reflection and of increasing consciousness, there are, besides the men of genius, artists who without them would not exist, who possess them and profit thereby but who, though far less powerful, are found upon the whole to be more intelligent than those divine monsters, whose knowledge and insight is more complete and whose conception of art and life is subtler. When I meet a book written by one of these men, what delight! I feel his work to be full of all that has gone before; I discover in it, together with the traits that constitute his character and his peculiar temperament, the latest state of mind, the most recent state of consciousness which humanity has reached. Though such an one is my superior, he is like me and we are at once on the same plane. All that he expresses is such that it seems I shall be able to feel and to experience myself some day. . . .

—*Les Contemporains.*

REMY DE GOURMONT

I

THE SELF AND THE WORLD

It is hard to characterize a literary development at that moment when its fruits are still uncertain, when even the blooming is not complete in the whole orchard. There are precocious trees, backward trees, and doubtful trees which one would not yet like to call barren: the orchard is very diverse, very rich, too rich;—the density of the leaves begets shade and the shade discolors the flowers and makes the fruits grow pale.

It is in this opulent and shadowy orchard that I shall walk, lingering for an instant at the foot of the trees that are strongest, most beautiful, most agreeable.

Whenever their importance, their necessity, their pertinence deserve it, literary developments are given a name; often the meaning of this name is not precise, but it is useful; it serves as a rallying point for those who receive it, and as a point of orientation for those who give it; thus the conflict takes place around a banner that is purely verbal. What does romanticism mean? It is easier to feel it than to explain it. What does symbolism mean? If you regard the word in its strictly etymological sense, almost nothing; if you go beyond that, it may possibly mean: individualism in literature, liberty in art, the abandoning of the formulæ of the schools, the tendencies toward whatever is new, strange, even bizarre; it may also mean: idealism, a disdain for the mere social anecdote, anti-naturalism, the tendency to fix attention only upon the characteristic detail in life, only upon the act that distinguishes one man from another, the desire to realize only results, only the essential;

to the poets themselves, finally, symbolism seems allied to verse that is free, verse that is unswathed, so that its young body can take its ease freed from the constraints of swaddling-clothes and bonds.

All this sustains but the slightest relation to the syllables of the word—for we must not permit anyone to insinuate that symbolism is nothing but a transformation of the old allegorical method or of the art of personifying an idea through a human being, a landscape or a fable. For all art is that, art the primordial and eternal, and any literature freed from that preoccupation would be beneath description; it would be naught; its aesthetic significance would be adequate to express the clucking of a curassow or the braying of a wild ass.

Literature, as a matter of fact, is nothing but the artistic development of the idea, nothing but the symbolizing of the idea by means of imaginary heroes. These heroes or men (for in his own sphere every man is a hero) are only roughly sketched by life; it is art that completes them by giving them, in exchange for their poor, sick soul, the treasure of an immortal idea, and the humblest can be called to participation in this, if he be chosen by a great poet. How humble a man was that Æneas whom Virgil loaded with all the burden of being the idea of the power of Rome, how humble that Don Quixote on whom Cervantes imposed the dreadful weight of being at the same time Roland and the four sons of Aymon, Amadis and Palmerin, Tristan and all the knights of the Round Table! The history of symbolism would be the history of man himself, since man cannot assimilate an idea unless it be symbolized. We must not be insistent, for we might seem to believe that the young devotees of symbolism are ignorant even of the "Vita Nuova" and of the figure of Beatrice whose frail and pure shoulders remain unbowed despite the complex burden of symbols with which the poet overwhelmed them.

Why, then, arose the illusion that the symbolization of the idea is a novelty?

It arose from the fact that we witnessed, during the recent past, a very serious attempt to found literature upon

a contempt for the idea and disdain of the symbol. Everyone knows the theory; it sounds like an extract from a book of cookery: "Take a slice of life, etc., etc." M. Zola, having invented this recipe, forgot to use it. His "slices of life" are the heavy poetic fruits of a muddy and tumultuous lyricism; they are popular romanticism, democratic symbolism, but always filled with an idea, always pregnant with some allegorical significance—"Germinal," "The Mine," "The Crowd," "The Strike." Hence the idealistic revolt was not directed against the literary products of naturalism (or only against the very base ones), but against its theory or, rather, against its pretentions. Though but returning to the anterior and eternal necessities of art, the rebels while professing nothing but their wish to reinstate the idea in literature, believed themselves to be affirming new and even surprising truths. All they did was to relight the torch and also to relight, all about them, many small candles.

Nevertheless there is a new truth that has recently come into literature and art. It is a wholly metaphysical one and wholly *a priori* (in apperance), and quite young, since it is but a century old, and truly new, since it has never before done service in the field of aesthetics. This truth, marvellous and like an evangel, liberating and of a renewing force, is the principle of the ideality of the world. In relation to man the thinking subject, the world and all that is external to the *ego*, exists only according to the idea of it which he forms for himself. We know only phenomena, we reason only concerning appearances; all truth in itself escapes us; the essence of things is unassailable by us. It is what Schopenhauer popularized in the very clear and simple formula: The world is my representation. I do not see what is; that which is, is what I see. There are as many diverse and perhaps different worlds as there are thinking men. This doctrine, which Kant left in the middle of the road to hasten to the help of ship-wrecked morality, is so beautiful and so supple that, without injuring its free logic, one may transpose it from theory to the most exacting practice; it is a principle of universal emancipation for any man capable of understanding it. It has revolutionized nothing but

aesthetics, but it is of aesthetics that we are speaking here.

In text-books there are still found definitions of the beautiful; the books go farther and give formulæ by which an artist can arrive at the expression of the beautiful. There are institutions where men teach these formulæ, which are nothing but the average or summing up of antecedent ideas or appreciations. And since aesthetic theories are generally obscure, there are given examples, ideal paradigms, models for the artist to follow. In these institutions (and the civilized world is only one vast institution) every novelty is held to be blasphemous and every personal affirmation to be an act of madness. M. Nordau, who has read the whole of contemporary literature with a bizarre patience, propagated the notion which is so basely destructive of all intellectual individualism, that non-conformity is the capital crime in a writer. This is violently untrue. The capital crime in a writer is conformity, imitation, submission to rules and teachings. The work of a writer should be not only the reflection, but the enlarged reflection of his personality. The only excuse that a man has for writing is that he express his own self, that he reveal to others the kind of world that is reflected in his individual mirror; his only excuse is that he be original; he must say things not said before and say them in a form not formulated before. He must create his own aesthetic—and we must admit as many aesthetics as there are original minds, and judge them according to what they are and not according to what they are not.

—*Le livre des Masques.*

II

LITERARY INFLUENCES

Vergil imitated Homer, Racine imitated Euripides, Corneille imitated Seneca. Each chose in a literature which he reverenced a master in harmony with his temperament. The French classic writers were pupils of the Latins and the Greeks, just as the romantics were of the English and the Germans. A new force in literature, in art, in politics, in

morals, never arises from within an ethnic group. Each group once formed and individualized is bound to a uniform production or, at least, to one systematized in fixed varieties. The race, the soil, the climate determine the particular nature of its activities and productions and limit their diversity. Man has the faculty of change, but he cannot change spontaneously—there is always necessary a leaven external to the lump. . . . Walled China, once its ossification was complete, scarcely changed in the course of many centuries. The peoples who change are those that welcome the most strangers, which may remind the botanist of those plants that welcome the most insects. England, some parts of whose organism seem changeless, is less visited throughout most of its provinces than Central Africa or the shores of the Amazon. . . . A stranger there arouses the populace; the peasants in some Coventry believed in a possible invasion by the Boers. Australia, though scarcely established, is in process of degenerating through lack of such ferments. The United States, if closed to immigration, would fall into complete languor, were it not for the European travels of its plutocracy, its extreme diversity of climates and soils and hence of races in the development of its vast empire. Psychical exchange among peoples is as necessary to the reinvigoration of each people as social intercourse is to the exaltation of individual energy. One has not sufficiently regarded this necessity when one speaks with regret of the influence of foreign literatures on our own. There is not a century since the eleventh during which French thought has not been revived by some foreign ferment; its power consisted in enduring so many fermentations without trouble and of showing itself, after each crisis, fresher and more alive. Thus women, and men no less, are made young again by a new love and find in almost uninterrupted passions the very principle of their vital activity. In the twelfth century it was the Celtic legend, the cycle of the Round Table, to which was added Tristan, which renewed the *chansons de geste;* then it was the Greek legend, as in the *Énéas* and *Alexandre;* next the courtliness of Provence with Chrétien de Troyes; later there were the *fabliaux* which came from

afar, from the very depths of the Orient, and up to the Renaissance when this torrent grew and rose, foreign influences did not cease to be the normal enrichment of French literature, to permit of its continual renewal, to multiply young flowers on the ancient stem.

The national spirit is no more thwarted by these absorptions than the blood of a man is vitiated by healthy food. The point is that the food must be healthy. If it is bad, the suffering organism makes an effort to get rid of it. . . . But an illness is not always useless, nor is a debauch. The dynamic influence of even a bad foreign literature is preferable to the debility and boredom in which isolated thinking is sure to lapse. Action is necessary, no matter in what sense. This, indeed, is the very principle of the law of inertia. There is no movement without a cause. And a force cannot act upon itself but only upon other forces. The river flows in vain unless the paddles of the mill-wheel rise against its current. But when one hears the rattle of the mill, the river finds itself; each time that you see a movement in any literature, you must look outside of that literature for the animating force. . . . And one might almost determine scientifically what ought to be, in proportion to its velocity and mass, the initial distance of a literary influence to make its impact a fruitful one. A small novelty, coming from very far, might easily outweigh in usefulnes sand force a more considerable innovation of an origin that is too near.

—*Le Problème du Style.*

III

VISION AND EMOTION

THERE are two kinds of style; they correspond to the two great classes of men—the visuals and the emotionals. Of a given thing seen, the visual will retain a memory in the form of a more or less exact, a more or less complicated image; the emotional will remember only the feeling which the spectacle aroused in him. Thus also, having read a novel, the visual could easily retrace its successive scenes,

which fix themselves in his brain in panoramic form; the pure emotional type knows only that the book is beautiful or lively or tiresome, but sometimes he will be able to recite pages of it. The well-known scholar Maury turned the pages of a book in his memory of it and read that remembered book with as much certainty as he did the real one. But the visual memory, if it be limited to the retention of printed characters, cannot, of course, play any such part in the elaboration of style as a memory that is truly concrete. If a landscape is in question and not a book, persons of this kind will recall only the landscape's impression on their sensibilities. From the view-point of style they are of the emotional type.

It may happen (but this is quite rare) that the visual memory and the emotional memory are equal and balanced masters of the same brain. The result will give us, according to the particular physiology of the man, his race, the soil that nourished him, a Chateaubriand, a Flaubert. . . . For if a writer possesses the emotional in addition to the visual memory, if, while evoking a material spectacle he has also the power of replacing himself into the precise emotional state which the spectacle produced in him, he is master of the whole art of writing. . . .

Without the visual memory, without the reservoir of images on which the imagination can draw for ever new and infinite combinations, there can be no style and no artistic creation. This faculty alone gives us the power not only of delineating the varied movements of life through verbal figures, but also of transforming into visions every association of words, every trite metaphor, in brief, the power of rendering life and death. It is this power that has given rise to the famous allegories. . . . The style of Michelet and that of Taine are products of this most happy faculty of transforming the abstract into the concrete, of making the stone to breathe and the very stars to tremble. Language is full of *clichés* which were originally bold images, happy finds of the power over metaphor. All abstract words are the figurative names of material acts. . . . The living words are compact of images; the smoothest discourse is a

tissue of metaphors more wrinkled than a page of Goncourt or Saint-Pol-Roux. One has used the expression, worn medals, and it is almost just. One side represents the sense with which the word started, the other that which it has gained. And both sides exist in so obliterated a condition that the most tyrannical imagination can no longer animate them. Many of those, however, who use these coins with predilection also use their eyes at least to sort the tarnished verbal riches stored up in their memory. In uttering the word *ocean* they see, instead of a glaucous immensity, or a shore of sand or cliffs, the word itself—admirable simplification—written in space in printed characters. More advanced intellectually than the visuals, these privileged individuals are grouped at the negative pole of that magnet, the positive pole of which is occupied by artists. A great step toward simplification has thus been made; a world of signs has been substituted for a world of things. But the progress is still greater when the world of signs appears to the eye without any perceptible form, when the words enclosed in the brain, as in an apparatus for distribution, pass directly from their cases at the end of the lips or the pen, without any intervention of the consciousness or the sensibilities. It is marvellous, as marvellous as the systematic agitation in an ant-heap or a bee-hive. While the visuals, even in subconscious phrases, must translate their vision as exactly as a painter, and seek words and combinations of words as a painter seeks colors and combinations of colors, to the mechanist's words and epithets come without a shock, fluidly, all the work of passing from the reality to the idea and from the idea to the reality having been performed for them in advance by previous writers. They are quite willing to employ everything that has been consecrated by common use, well-known phrases, rich in emotional ferment because they have been dragged everywhere, flat locutions, proverbs, all that is used to abridge and to sum up.

But—and this is the chief point—in the opening phrase of a novel as vulgar as this: "It was on a radiant spring morning," there may be a genuine emotion. It would, without any doubt, that the reader is neither a visual nor

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an artist, but not that he is devoid of sensibility; on the contrary, he is, very notably, an emotional! Only, since he is incapable of embodying his personal mode of feeling in stylistic forms of original structure, he chooses phrases which, having once moved him must also, he believes, move his readers. One need not even suppose a calculated effect where there is simply the ingenuous association of a word and a sentiment. Words have no meaning except by virtue of the sentiment which they enclose, the representation of which one then bestows upon them. Even the propositions of geometry become sentiments, as Pascal has put it in one of those prodigious phrases which it has taken three centuries to understand. A theorem may be moving and its solution may make the heart beat faster. It has become a sentiment in the sense that it is no longer perceived except in association with a sentiment; it can contain a world of desires and be an object of love. The most inert words can be vivified by the sensibility and can thus become sentiments. All those that certain political philosophers abuse, such as justice, truth, equality, democracy, liberty, and a hundred others, have no value except the purely sentimental one attributed to them by him who speaks them. Not only the content of the word has become a sentiment to him who employs it, but even its material form and the atmosphere that surrounds it. Any word, any locution, even proverbs, even mere verbal stop-gaps can become for the writer of the emotional kind nuclei of sentimental crystalization. Having no garden of his own, he buys flowers and fancies that he has gathered them. Since he does not use his sensibility to create, it remains abundant; moreover, he distributes it only in small bits around the words which he desires to embalm; he has enough left for life, for love, for all the passions. The writer of an abstract style is almost always a sentimentalist or, at least, a sensitive soul. The artist writer is almost never the former, rarely the latter. For he embodies all his sensibility in his style and has very little left for life or for profound passion. The one takes a ready-made phrase or writes over a facile one to which, deceived by his own feeling, he attributes an emotional value; the

other takes words that are but handfuls of clay, constructs the bones of his work and raises a statue which, beautiful or awkward, heavy or winged, will still keep in its attitude a little of the life which animated the hands that kneaded it. And yet the vulgar mind will be more moved by the banal phrase than by the original one. And this will be the counter-proof: Opposed to the reader who draws his emotion from the medium of literature itself, stands the reader who does not feel what he reads except in so far as he can apply it to his own life, to his griefs and hopes. He who savors the literary beauty of a sermon by Bossuet can not be touched by it in a religious sense, and he who weeps over the death of Ophelia has no aesthetic sense. These two categories of writers and readers constitute the two great types of cultivated humanity. Despite shadings and confusions, no understanding is possible between them; without any mutual comprehension, they despise one another. Their animosity extends in two large though, at times, subterranean streams throughout the length of the history of literature.

—*Le Problème du Style.*

IV

FORM AND SUBSTANCE

In literature the foundation of things has an importance that is absolute. There is no variety of literature that can escape the necessity of sinking its foundations deep and building them solidly. To the poet we may concede at times the right of making something out of nothing; but there are nothings and nothings. The trifling circumstances of love are nothings. Yet they are, like everything that touches upon the transmission of life, of an incalculable importance. Always and unfailingly it is the foundation that counts. A new fact or a new idea is worth more than a fine phrase. A lovely phrase is a lovely thing and so is a lovely flower. But their duration is almost the same—a day, a century. Nothing dies more swiftly than a style which does not rest upon the solidity of vigorous thinking.

Such a style shrivels like a stretched skin; it falls in a heap as ivy does from the rotten tree that once gave it support. If any one replies that the ivy may keep a tree with dried-out roots from falling, I grant it. Style is a force, too. But its value diminishes with a swiftness proportionate to its enfeeblement through trying to preserve from annihilation the fragility which it embraces and supports.

It is probably an error to attempt to distinguish between form and substance. It smacks of the scholastic reasoning which helped St. Thomas Aquinas to expatiate on the union of the soul with the body; he found it easy to prove that form is a function of the soul and that, before or after the arrival or departure of the soul, the embryo and the cadaver could possess only illusory forms. These distinctions no longer have any validity. There is no such thing as amorphous matter; all thought has a limit, hence a form, since it is a partial representation of true or possible, real or imaginary life. Substance engenders form exactly as the tortoise or the oyster do the materials of their respective shells.

Even those philosophers who bring us that which is new in thought, bring it united to its form which is also new. Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Descartes, Pascal, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are all great writers, and several of them great poets. One should distrust a philosophy stuck in the mud of the scholastic: it is engulfed because it has delayed setting its snares for the reason. . . .

The great scientists have been, nearly all, so soon as they took the trouble to write, perfect writers. Their imagination is necessarily visual. Since they describe what one sees or will see, their speech produces images. Even the mathematician, the geometrician and the chess-player is, in this sense, a seer. Linné, Galileo, Leibnitz, Lavoisier, Lamarck, Gauss, Claude Bernard and Pasteur write with energy and sureness of touch; Goethe did not put less of his literary genius into his scientific works than into his poems.

Form without a foundation, style without thought—what a poor thing it is! That poverty is miraculously realized in the prose of Banville, to mention but one of our illus-

trious contemporaries. The contrast between the supple and glistening beauty of the robe and the skeleton that wears it has something pitiful, like a cemetery covered with flowers. The value of the style is exactly equal to the value of the thought. That is the central truth.

Errors of judgment occur in this matter because people believe that there is no style where there is no "poetic style." They make an exception in favor of Pascal only to count up his antitheses and range them on glazed paper like precious stones. But that is only the shadow of Montaigne. The true Pascal radiates such a light that antitheses are drowned in it and become invisible. . . .

If nothing lives in literature except by its style, that is because works well thought out are invariably well written. But the converse is not true. Style alone is nothing. It will even happen—for in aesthetics as in love all things are possible—that style which makes certain works live for a time, will cause others to perish prematurely. Cymodocea died smothered under her too rich and heavy robe.

The sign of the man in any intellectual work is the thought. The thought *is* the man. And style and thought are one.

—*Le Problème du Style.*

PART TWO

FRIEDRICH HEBBEL

I

APHORISMS ON ART

THE task of all art is the representation of life, that is, the visible embodiment of the infinite through the individual phenomenon. Art achieves its aim by grasping the characteristic and significant elements of an individual or a condition.

* * *

This is the first and only law or art, that the infinite shall be made visible in the concrete and the particular.

* * *

Creative art is a spirit that can sink itself into every form and into every condition of being and can grasp and render visible the laws of the former and the fundamental character of the latter. Its function is to redeem Nature unto the highest expression of its characteristic life, Man to his utmost freedom, the Divine which in its infinity we cannot grasp unto its necessary existence.

* * *

It is the first and the last aim of art to make the life process itself visible to show how the innermost core of man's being developes within the surrounding atmosphere, whether that be favorable or not. It is an error to assert that only the completed is fit material for the poet. On the contrary, his subject is the becoming, all that is being born of its conflicts with the elements of creation.

* * *

The characters in creative work are to be at the same

time individual and general. It is the problem that Nature solves daily in every human being.

* * *

The poet, like the priest, drinks the sacred blood, and all the world feels the presence of God.

* * *

Art is the conscience of mankind.

* * *

In the realm of the aesthetic there are no pure or impure subjects. The highest subject may be contaminated by an ignoble form, the lowliest may be transmuted by nobility of embodiment.

* * *

The substance of a work of art is never immoral. If it seem so, it is the fault of the form, but not of the form in its real nature, but of the accidental imperfections of its execution.

* * *

One kind of criticism alone is worthy of respect. It says to the poet: This is what you willed to create, for this you were fated to will. It then proceeds to investigate the relation of the product to the producing will. All other criticism is of evil.

* * *

One does not sit down to play the piano in order to demonstrate a mathematical truth. Nor does one write poetry in order to prove anything. It is the peculiar beauty of all the higher activities of man that they serve purposes that were not in the mind of the acting individual.

* * *

Whoever absorbs a work of art into himself goes through the same process as the artist who produced it—only he reverses the order of the process and increases its speed.

* * *

All poetic activity is a revelation. In the poet's soul all humanity goes through the gestures of its weal and woe and each poem is a gospel wherein is expressed some deepest thing that conditions a form of human being or one of its elements.

II

APHORISMS ON THE DRAMA

THE drama is not to tell us new stories, but to show new relations.

* * *

The modern drama, if we are to have such a drama, must necessarily transcend the Shakespearean and differ from it in this respect—that the conflict of dramatic reasoning is to be not only within the characters but is to be transferred to the idea itself. Thus not only shall the relations of men to moral concepts be debated, but the validity of those very concepts.

* * *

All characters must be in the right.

* * *

It seems to me a sin against the holy spirit of truth if a dramatist seeks to infuse into his work a reconciliation with the fate of man or the world-order which his own soul has not yet reached.

* * *

In the higher realm of art shiftless characters are as impossible as shiftless roses are in a garden. Everything becomes what it can become.

* * *

The three stages of artistic effect: It can be thus! It is! It must be thus!

* * *

If people could but be taught that the dramatic poet must busy himself with every species of human character, even as the naturalist observes every species of animal and plant, whether the specimens be beautiful or ugly, poisonous or wholesome, for it is his duty to represent the totality of things.

* * *

How shall realism and idealism be harmoniously united in the drama? By heightening the former and subduing the latter. A character must never act or speak beyond

his world, but for whatever is possible within that world he may find the purest form, the noblest expression.

* * *

Ideas are to the drama what counterpoint is to music—nothing in themselves, but the basic condition of everything.

* * *

Historic plays that turn toward a past which is wholly dead to the present, and seek to resurrect that past are, to my mind, testimonials of a thorough misunderstanding of the art of the drama and its purpose. What I desire to embody and make visible is the origin of religious and political conditions which, however modified in the course of the centuries, persist to our own day. The poet is to grasp the nature of the process of history.

* * *

In my judgment the drama is a great circle that is composed of many smaller ones. Time may and, indeed, must fill those smaller ones with its material stuff, for whence else could the art-form derive the necessity of its continuance? But this substance furnished by partial characters, even at times by situations, must be purified in the great enclosing circle of the whole and rationally reduced to its true inner content.

—*Hebbels Tagebücher.*

WILHELM DILTHEY

I

THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION

1

At first sight the creative imagination seems a miracle, a phenomenon utterly different from anything in the daily life of men. Yet it is but the more powerful organization of certain individuals which is founded upon the unusual energy of definite and elementary processes. Starting with these processes the entire mental life, without deviating from its general laws, assumes a form that diverges widely from the ordinary.

In different individuals the images of memory have, under identical conditions, a very varying degree of clearness and strength, of concreteness and plasticity. There exists a series consisting of utterly different kinds of mental reproductions, extending from the representation of mere colorless and soundless shadows to the power of projecting into space beyond the unseeing eyes of the body the actual forms of men and things. Now the gift for creative literature is closely connected with this extraordinary faculty of sustaining in or lending to reproduced or freely formed mental images a very high degree of concreteness and plasticity. For the necessary foundation of the poet's plastic thinking is the tangibly concrete and the movement of sharply defined figures. It demands, at the same time, a great wealth of acquired impressions and a great completeness in the images of the memory. From this wealth and completeness springs the poet's power of merely reproductive narration.

What, now, is the relation between wealth of experience

and the free, creative imagination, between the reproduction and the creation of the forms and circumstances and fates of men? The power of association which summons to the mind given elements in a given connection seems sharply differentiated from the creative power which weaves these given elements into new combinations. In order to investigate the true relationship between these two basic phenomena of the psychical life, it is necessary to use the descriptive method and to refrain from the admixture of any explanatory hypotheses. Thus alone can the historian of poetry be trusted to use, in his conception of literature, the subtler insights of psychology instead of the cruder notions of common life.

In the processes of the mental life as we can grasp them, the identical representation can no more return to the consciousness that originally produced it than it can arise in another consciousness. The new spring does not bring back to me the vision of last year's leaves: to-day cannot reawaken in me the images of yesterday except dimly and indistinctly. Suppose that, without changing our posture, we close the eyes that have just received the image of an object, but permit no renewed application of the stimulus to the retina. At this moment, it is clear, the image into which perception has been transformed possesses its highest possible vividness and strength. Yet we shall find that even in this memory image there is present but a portion of the elements which were included in the perceptual process, and we shall find that even here, where the recollection is purposeless and lifeless, a strong effort to recall the whole picture will reveal an attempt at imitative re-creation. When, however, the processes of perception and representation are separated by the intrusion of other images, and we desire then to recall the entire content of the original perception, we shall find the character of the resultant representation conditioned upon a definite attitude in the immediate present of the soul. We shall find that the representation will select only such materials from the actual content of the original perception as have a direct relation to our present state of mind, and will thus impart to the image an emo-

tional coloring that is dependent on a relation, either of similarity or contrast, to the immediately present mood of the soul. Thus in times of painful restlessness the image of a past condition of quietude, however joyless, can arise in the soul as a blessed island of sunniest peace. And at times this process can lead to the building up of representations that are wholly false. Furthermore, we do not, as a rule, strive to recall isolated impressions, the recollection of which depends on the momentary vision given by a definite perceptual act. We strive to build up representations or combinations of representations, each of which represents an object perceived by us originally in many ways and situations. In that case the building of our representative images departs still more widely from an act of merely lifeless reproduction and approaches far more closely an act of artistic re-creation. There is, in a word, no imaginative power that is not based upon memory; there is, conversely, no memory that does not contain an element of the imaginative power. Recollection is in itself metamorphosis. A knowledge of this truth permits us to realize the connection between the most elementary processes of the psychical life and the highest achievements of the creative faculty. It gives us an insight into the origins of that mobile life of the spirit, wholly individual and forever unique in each instance, whose happiest expression is the immortal creatures of the artistic imagination. For reproduction is itself a creative process.

Thus the peculiar organization of the poet reveals itself in this respect by the energy with which he carries on such simple processes as perception, memory, reproduction—processes by virtue of which images of the most manifold character—such as people in their circumstances and their fate—move and live in his consciousness. For we have discovered in memory itself that which makes it akin to the imagination, and we have found a transforming power ruling the whole life of the images in our soul. This is further proved by certain peculiar phenomena of the sense of sight. Has not everyone lain with closed eyes just before falling asleep and been delighted with the simplest visual

images that appeared? To the passive sensitiveness of sight the inner organic stimuli appear, under such conditions, as waves and wandering mists out of which there arise, quite without our intervention (since we are wholly absorbed in passive vision), gleaming and many-colored images that melt uninterruptedly into each other.

The transforming of those images which the memory affords or the rearrangement of their order is, however, but the simplest, although the most instructive, example of the creative processes that characterize the imagination. For these processes bring forth new images without number by methods of heightening and softening, reordering and universalizing, building types and re-transforming the already transformed, sometimes unconsciously, at others by an act of the will. Certain elements in the images are thus rejected, others emphasized, and memories are completed until they assume a present and visible form. And this same transformation that changes and transcends the contents of experience and perception applies also to the associative order of the images of representation. There results an actual thinking in images, in which the imagination achieves a new freedom. We strive to transform the past by an activity of thought; imaginatively we forecast the possibilities of the future; we project apparently unfounded happenings and merge ourselves into them; we identify ourselves with lifeless things and animate them with unheard-of activities. And this whole process is heightened when the energy that rules it assumes purposefulness and is directed toward a conscious aim. And the powers that evoke these transformations from the images of memory are born in the depths of the soul when life stirs it into delight or pain, passion or aspiration.

A great principle underlies all this, a force that permits specially organized temperaments to change the simplest processes of the psychical life into poetic creation. This force is most active in children, in primitive men, in persons under the influence of passion or of dreams and in artists. It differs wholly from the regulated imagination of the politician, the inventor and the investigator who constantly con-

trol their imagination in order to confine it within the limits of the real.

2

The next question is how, from this general trait of the imagination which lets it approach the creative act, there arises the specifically poetic imagination and what are the distinguishing marks of the latter?

We have seen that the imagination is woven into the whole psychical process. Every expression of our daily lives involuntarily transforms the data of experience. Our wishes, our fears, our dreams of the future go beyond the known reality. Every action is determined by an image of something that has not yet come into being. The ideals of life lead the individual and the race toward higher aims. The great moments of life—birth, love, death—are spiritualized by ceremonies that hide the reality and point beyond it.

From all this I would at once distinguish that activity of the imagination which tries to build up a second world different from the world of our daily life and conversation. An involuntary imaginative activity of this kind is found in dreams, which are the oldest of poets. It is found in life wherever man desires voluntarily to free himself from the bonds of reality—in pure play or, above all, where a festive heightening of existence seeks to create a world separate from the real one through masques or disguises or pageantry. The age of chivalry and the courtly culture of the Renaissance illustrate how the creation of a poetic world, distinct from life, is prepared within life. And similarly the religious imagination builds up a world distinct from the realities of experience. From an intercourse with unseen powers arise the visions of divine beings. But they are woven into the suffering and the activity of life. Thus it is first of all the needs of life to which the religious imagination in myth and cult is fettered. As civilization proceeds it is gradually sundered from the direct religious aims and raises that second world to the point of independent significance which it assumes in Homer, in the Greek tragic writers, in Dante,

in Wolfram von Eschenbach. Thus it is poetry that first frees the supersensual, religious world from the bonds that tie it to life's needs and aims.

It is only now that we can grasp the nature of the poetic imagination. All that has been said hitherto deals only with the general conditions necessary to its existence. It is the very inner nature of those psychical processes within which the poet's world is formed. The foundation of these processes always consists of concrete experiences and of the background of visual images which these experiences offer. Involuntary and unobserved activities are constantly at work here. They mould the color and form of the world in which the poet lives. And here is the point at which the connection between experience and the poet's imagination begin to grow clear. The poetic world exists before the poet draws from any particular happening the idea of a given work, and before he has written a single line. The process within which, by virtue of the fundamental psychical activities, the poetic world arises and the individual work of art is born, receives the law of its being from a relation to life's reality which is utterly different from the relation sustained by the elements of experience to the co-ordinative character of knowledge. The poet lives in the wealth of the experiences of the world of man as he finds it within and without himself. And its facts are to him not data which he uses to satisfy the demands of some system of his, nor does he seek to generalize from them. His eye rests upon them in brooding passiveness and they become meaningful to him. They stir his emotions, now gently, now powerfully, no matter how far the mere facts lie from the circle of his personal interests or how distant they are in the past. They are a portion of his very self.

All the forces of his mind and character work at the web of the many-colored carpet of representative poetry and its figures. The soul is the living foundation of all poetry. But it is at the same time penetrated by thought. For in any highly developed man there are but few imaginative representations which do not hold some universal element; and in the world of man there is, by virtue of the influence

of general social conditions and psychical behavior, no individual who is not representative from more points of view than one, nor any individual fate which is not an instance of some more general type of human fortune. These images of men and of their fates are then so shaped by the influence of the contemplative mind that, though they present but isolated groups of facts, they yet appear so drenched by the universal as to become representative of it. To achieve this end there is no necessity at all for a work of art to contain any general reflections, the function of which is primarily to ease the passion, to break the tension, to liberate the audience for a moment from the keenness of its sympathies and atune it to a more thoughtful mood. . . .

II

EXPERIENCE AND CREATION

The individual traits of Goethe's creative imagination lead us back to a psychical plexus that is ultimately grounded in his experience and in his grasp of life. Here we penetrate to the very roots from which the peculiar character of his creative activity and of his works arises. Even in poets whose content is slighter, such as Lenau or Verlaine, the linguistic imagination, wherever it produces strong effects, is found to be rooted in a remarkable and profound activity that embraces the depths of their lives. We are dealing now, however, with the greatest poetic personality of modern times. In Goethe the shaping power of the imagination which produces that which is new in the sphere of the individual, the concrete, and the tangible, extended its universal activity to the practical work of the public official, the statesman, the scientist, the cultivator of his own self. Thus in him the poetic gift was but the highest manifestation of a power already active in life. To live, to create, to write—these acts of his were intimately blended. And this personality appeared in an epoch which the Enlightenment had delivered from the bonds of religion. *All the great poets prior to Goethe interpreted life and the*

world under the guidance of traditional ideas. Now at last the time was ripe for the solution of the highest creative problem: the interpretation of life out of its own nature and its representation in its native significance and beauty. Here at last we have pure naturalness, unclouded vision, the deepest oneness between life and poetry. *Goethe is the seer of life who revealed to all the poets and philosophers who came after him the art of interpreting human life simply upon the basis of its own reality. . . .*

At this point a number of general reflections again become necessary.

Every poetic work is the representation of a single action. In its representative character it gives the mere appearance of some reality by means of words and combinations of words. Thus it must use all the means of language to produce its impression and illusion, and in this artistic handling of language we find an immediate and important aesthetic characteristic that belongs to every work of art. Next, the creative work offers its reader or beholder a new freedom in that it transports him into a world that lies beyond the necessities of his actual existence. It heightens his consciousness of life. It employs all the forces of his nature in a vicarious re-experiencing of this world of the imagination, beginning with a delight in melody, rhythm and concrete visualization, and extending to the deepest understanding of the action according to its relations with the whole breadth of human life. For every true work of poetic creation emphasizes through that segment of reality which it presents, some aspect of life that has not hitherto been thus envisaged. While it makes visible the causal concatenation of actions, it permits us at the same time to have a vicarious experience of the values which belong to an action and to its elements within the organic life process. Thus the action is raised to its own inherent significance. There is no great naturalistic work that does not lend expression to such significant traits of human life, however comfortless or bizarre however rooted in some blind nature they may be. *The art of the greatest poets, then, consists in so presenting an action that the inner coherence and meaning of life itself shall arise*

from it. Thus poetry opens to us the understanding of life. Through the eyes of the great poets we become aware of the values and interconnection of all human things.

Thus we have reached the decisive insight of our search: the content of a poetic work, which raises a concrete event to true significance, has its foundation in the personal experience of the poet and the circle of ideas in which he lives. The starting point of poetic activity is always an experience of life, whether personal or gained through an understanding of others, present or past, and of the happenings in which they were involved. Each of the innumerable states of consciousness through which the poet passes may, of course, be called an experience in the psychological sense. Here we shall limit the word to mean those moments of his life or those aspects of their interplay which disclose to him a trait of life. We must also let it mean whatever has come to the poet from the world of ideas, and the influence of ideas on Dante and Shakespeare and Schiller was very great. And this is just. For all religious, metaphysical and historic ideas are in the end but precipitates of vital human experiences in the past: they are representations of these and help the poet to become aware of new aspects of life only in so far as they clarify his own actual experiences for him. Thus the idealism of liberty which Schiller took over from Kant served but to clarify that great inner experience of his own, in which his lofty nature became aware of its dignity and sovereignty through an actual conflict with the world.

Thus the foundations of poetic activity are seen to contain: 1. Personal experience; 2. Insight into the experiences of others; 3. The widening and deepening of experience through ideas. It is clear that from this foundation a great wealth of modifications in the experiences of the poet must and can arise. . . .

While upon this foundation a human happening is raised to its true significance, there arises a poetic structure. Now as we distinguish in some object in nature its chemical composition, its specific gravity, etc., and study each of these aspects of it separately, so in the case of a work of repre-

sentative poetry—epic, ballad, drama or novel—it is legitimate to distinguish among substance, dominant mood, central motive, fable, characters and means of representation. The most important among these elements is that of the central motive. For in it the poet has crystallized his basic experience in its inner significance and through it that experience is connected with the fable, the characters and the plastic form. It holds within itself the creative force that determines the form of the resultant work of art. As in the phenomenon of organic growth, so it is from the vital experience of the poet that the various distinguishable elements of his work arise. Each of them then functions within the whole.

Thus every creative work is a living organism of a unique character. The highest critical understanding of a poet could be reached if one could reveal the inner nature of those conditions within him and without him under which arose that particular modification of his experience and insights which determined the creative activity in question, and if we could show further precisely how the central motive, the fable, the characters and the means of representation were inherent in that particular modification of his experience as a man! Thus, too, we could make clear the peculiar character of his genius both in its strength and in its limitations through comparison with that of other poets.

—*Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung.*

JOHANNES VOLKELT

THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRAGEDY

If it be true that art shall always present substance of truly human significance, its connection with fundamental views of life and of the world is implied at once. This does not mean, of course, that every work of art, every bit of pottery, every landscape garden, every lyric is to communicate a definite philosophical attitude. But we may truly assert this, that both personal and cosmic philosophy have gone to the making of a work of art and can be felt therein in exact proportion in which that work and its substance have been drawn from the depths of human striving and conflict, in exact proportion to the breadth and insight with which it brings to our view the character and development, the driving forces, the aims and values of the life of man.

It is evident from this that the tragic in art is at once and throughout its whole extent brought into a peculiarly close relation to the artist's view of man and of the world. For in tragedy, if anywhere in the realm of art, the humanly significant appears at its deepest. It does not reveal itself there in the comparatively insignificant, narrow and superficial way that it commonly does in art that is merely charming, ingratiating, suggestive. Tragedy is born from the exertion of the deepest and innermost forces of human nature, from the stirring up of the whole soul, from the coming to light of all aspects of our being—the great and the common, the healthful and the sick; it springs from all that is decisive in our estimate of the inner significance of human life and of the varying values of human striving. And thus it comes about that every good tragedy leaves in

us the impression that our consciousness of what it means to be human has grown riper.

So soon as we acknowledge tragedy to possess this deepened relation to the humanly significant, it follows at once that the representation of the tragic must be more or less interpenetrated by the creative mind's attitude toward life and the world. It is impossible to express the inner sense of life, its value or lack of value, its impelling forces and its ends through the creation of character, without the formative influence of the poet's fundamental convictions. It matters little whether these convictions have assumed the forms of philosophic thought, or the less sharply defined form of religious belief or are embodied only as constant moods and emotional certainties. In any case, consciously or not, they influence the creative act. The sensuous or the moralistic, the affirmative of life or the other-worldly, the reconciled or the riven soul, the self-glorification of the individual or the profound reverence for higher powers—whatever is contained in the poet's typical mood or vision stamps itself as form and color upon the creation of tragedy. And as the poet is more reflectively inclined, as he is more accustomed to interpret the surface appearances of life by the significance of deeper connections, and to envisage the world not merely as given but with more penetrating and more prescient instincts, so ever more richly and inevitably will the elements of his most general convictions be woven into his works. One vision of man and nature confronts us in Sophocles, another in Shakespeare or in Calderon, another in Schiller and Goethe, one in Grillparzer and another in Ibsen, even though it may be difficult to embody in precise conceptions these dim but effectively projected backgrounds of thought.

The theory of tragedy, likewise, is as little capable of being divided from a definite view of life and of the world as the artistic creation of tragic characters and events itself. This is true in the first place, of course, because the critic must admit, as I have shown, that the artistic creation of the tragic necessarily embodies the individual poet's philosophy of life. But it is also true because the critic's theory

of the tragic depends more or less upon his own background of thought. However stringently a theory of tragedy may guard itself against metaphysical derivation or presupposition, however closely and simply it may cling to psychology and experience, yet the idea which the individual critic has of the sense and value of life, of the development and aim of humanity, and of man's place in the world will involuntarily determine his fundamental conception of the character of tragedy. . . .

Now it is equally necessary to define the limits beyond which the dependence of the tragic upon a philosophy of life and of the world must not be pushed. I desire to point out especially one violation of these proper limits that is of frequent occurence and is particularly harmful to any theory of tragedy. The frequent distrust and contempt of the aesthetics of tragedy arise not least from the fact that the tragic is too frequently denied its full freedom of choice amid the contending philosophies of life.

Critics have too often yielded to the temptation of prescribing one definite philosophy as the necessary basis of tragedy. It has been too frequently assumed that it is the function of tragedy to subserve a single rigid vision of life and of the world. And naturally it has been in each instance that vision which the critic in question confesses to be his own. If there appear in tragedy some other way of regarding men and their fate, nature or the soul, he sets it down as a fault. He assigns to one view of things a prior right. Within the limits of that view the dramatist is to move; according to it the public is to form its taste.

Nor is this true only of the philosophers of the older type. It is not only Schelling, Solger, Hegel, Vischer, Zeising, Schopenhauer or Hartmann who demand their own philosophy of tragedy: the most modern critics fall into the same error. On the one hand, the latter complain movingly that the old aestheticians sought to force their philosophy upon tragedy; on the other hand they demand of every work of art their modern vision of the sum of things and thus exercise an equal tyranny. Whoever, in a word, demands of tragedy that it exhibit the method of thought characteristic

of Darwin or Haeckel or Nietzsche, is no more justified from the standpoint of aesthetics than he who demands that it express an Hegelian or a Christian-theistic attitude.

These intolerant critics should consider how limited are the validity and convincing power of any single philosophy. Each of these critics insists that precisely his views of man and of the world are to form the guiding spirit of tragedy. Thus each of them really denies to the great majority among artists and among the public the capacity of being rightly moved by tragic art. For if the auditor does not enter the circle of ideas peculiar to Schelling or Nietzsche, Schopenhauer or Darwin, he lacks, according to the critic, understanding and feeling both for the kernel and centre of the tragic; in an auditor or artist of this kind the tragic would therefore be but superficially and distortedly reflected. It is strange that these critics have never been impressed with their own arrogance in excluding by far the greater portion of both artists and public from the appreciation of tragedy. The undoubted dependence of the tragic upon a philosophy of life must be understood in a far more liberal sense. We must at once grant the poet a playground of many philosophies. We must be tolerant enough not only to permit poets to unfold the tragic from the basis of different philosophies; we must rejoice thereat. And of the auditor or reader we must demand that he shall quite simply enter into the world-view of the poet as it arises more or less clearly from the depth of the artistic whole; that he shall live himself into the tragic in that particular form and color which the poet's world-view has lent it. The poet on his part may ask that the reader will not hastily or insistently demand the world-view he has himself attained through his own mind or through that of a philosopher he reveres, in which he dwells unbendingly and from whose vantage-point he exercises a criticism purely negative.

Thus in this question of the dependence of tragedy upon philosophy, it is our first duty to practice tolerance. It is not for us to deplore the fact, but to rejoice at it, that the fundamentally different ways in which the lot of man and the course of nature have been reflected in notable spirits

shall find an expression in works of creative art. Art must be hospitable to the multiform developments of our thoughts concerning life and the world, to their incessant flux and conflict. The philosophical and religious conflicts of the human spirit must find expression in the creations of art, which is in very truth a living element in the development of civilization. If are were limited to founding itself upon but one philosophical attitude—the Hegelian, for instance, or the Darwinian and materialistic—such an exclusion of all the other directions of human meditation, investigation and striving would lead to a state of incredible artistic impoverishment and dessication. And that limitation would also imply, as I have pointed out, an arrogant injustice against men who occupy a different philosophical ground from yourself. Thus in the world of art, the freest activity that is possible must be granted to those different attitudes to the sum of experience which the human mind has conquered in the course of its development.

—*Aesthetik des Tragischen.*

RICHARD MORITZ MEYER

THE MODERN POET

In order to show the specific nature of that which is called "modern" in the world literature of the present, we can do no better than to fix our attention upon the poetic process itself.

That this process is changeless and unchangeable is a prejudice that yields at once to both historical and psychological investigation. If we compare but for a moment the birth of a poem among such primitive men as can still be observed with the birth of one within the zones of our civilization, we shall find that there remain but two things common to the two processes, two inevitable circumstances: the element of subjective excitement; the object that induces the excitement. Beyond that we shall find that even the most naïve poetry of any modern is differentiated from the choric chant at the bier of a hero or from the marching song of battle by an infinite measure of consciousness, tradition, formal demands, and striving after originality. . . . The poetic process itself undergoes a long but ceaseless development. The fact that the momentary results of this development are felt, even though not consciously felt, by any given group of contemporaries is proven by the fact that each epoch in history has a different conception of the typical poet. The change that has taken place in men's views concerning the character of the poet and his work has been so remarkable that I am inclined to regard the formation of the modern ideal of the poet as the central and determining fact in the literary development of our period.

It is impossible to enter exhaustively into the ideal of the poet. It will suffice to point out a few important phases in its development. That development is characterized by

two chief factors: the poet becomes more sharply differentiated from the tribal group which is his audience; poetic activity is progressively liberated from the stimulus of an external exciting cause. The history of the poetic process is essentially the history of these two gradual liberations.

Among primitive men the poet is merely one of many whom a group experience has wrought up emotionally to such a pitch that a liberation from excitement is as strongly desired as the satisfaction of a physical need. From the group of the mourners, the rejoicing, the enraged, the terror-stricken, there leaps forth one in whom the passion common to all has crystalized into intelligible speech; another leaps forth, perhaps a third. And each time the group of by-standers expresses its assent and inner liberation by cries and ululations. Here we observe that the poet has no existence separate from the tribe. The excitement once past, he is a mere tribal unit like any other. He makes no demand of his tribe; the tribe makes no demand of him.

Nevertheless we shall have to assume even in this "precentor" of primitive times a specific gift: in some small measure, at least, a god gave him, above his brethren, the power to utter what he suffered. If and whenever this individual gift was heightened, the man in question became capable of reacting to stimuli not powerful enough to excite the tribal group. He no longer uttered his cry only under the immediate stimulus of death, war, hunger. The vivid recollection of these things sufficed him. And thus took place the first liberation of poetry from the immediate occasion, the first poetic projection of the past and distant. Our man with his individual emotion is now seen to stand among his calmer tribesmen, whom he draws into the circle of his own mood. Thus he becomes to them the seer, the inspired one, the vessel of a divine revelation. And this conception, which has never been wholly separated from the image of the poet, has been emphasized in very varying degrees at different times.

When, in the course of time, the tribe begins to feel the need of an excited mood (whether as an atmosphere for the prophesying of secret things, or because the heightened

speech of poetry comes to seem proper for the expression of divine messages), a new and very definite view of the poetic character and speech is bound to arise. For such speech is now demanded of the poet who is regarded as an artificer, as the possessor of certain technical methods and dexterities, such as the smith and the medicinman possess of their crafts. Men then say that he knows how to "make" something, that he is a "maker," a poet. His activity is then ranked with the chief arts of the two primitive sexes and he is said to "forge" or to "weave" his verses. Without the urge of an inner excitement of his own he must now be prepared to practice his art upon a tribal demand and proceed to his performance as the priest proceeds to the the offering of a sacrifice. The poet is now well differentiated from the tribal mass by the possession of a definite skill; poetic exercises—in celebration, perhaps, of illustrious ancestors—are demanded of him and his work is recognized and rewarded. This new element, likewise, that, namely, of the notion of a poetic art that can be consciously learned and practiced according to rules, has faded only temporarily from the universal idea of the poet. It has done so usually in periods of literary storm and stress when the poet has been assigned his most ancient function of merely lending his personal voice to a tribal passion.

Through this undue emphasis upon an acquired art of poetry and the accompanying neglect of personal talent, there arose in the Middle Ages the type of the learned poet who lives in equal estrangement from the public and from the stimulation through personal emotion. This poet is still distinguished from his fellowmen by the possession of a peculiar dexterity. But this possession is no longer seen as the result of a cultivated gift but as the fruit of his industry. What is demanded of him is the fulfillment of prescribed literary laws, although the formulæ of courtesy still ally him to his inspired ancestor. In reality poetry had become a profession, and one of which the higher classes were a little ashamed. In hours of leisure a gentleman might write verses, but the making of "master pieces" was left to the members of the poetic guild. . . .

It is clear that our age has essentially transcended these three primitive types of the poetic character. They survive merely in a few stormy chanters, a few coldly cultural artificers, and the many industrious purveyors of cheap fiction. In the higher orders of literature we will have none of them. For in the primitive seer our taste and judgment misses the element of form, in the artificer that of personality, in the mere poetic workman that of truth. The last we hold to be the lowest, for in him any inner connection between the poet and the poem has been abandoned. In him there is no inevitability in the choice of subject, the creation of form, the direction of tendency. . . .

It was the new cult of genius which came to the continent from England and was nourished on the contemplation of ancient and oriental folk-art, that again set free the specifically poetic within the poet. But the new ideal was useless without men to correspond to it. Young proclaimed it amid great applause. But it was not until more than fifty years after the production of his own chief work that great original forces revealed themselves in English poetry. In the meantime Johann Gottfried Herder in the city of Strassburg evoked in the soul of the young Goethe the first great example of the modern poetic ideal.

The poetry of Goethe is based wholly upon inner experience. He called his works the fragments of a great confession; he insists that his poems were, in the higher sense, always poems of occasion. Therein we see first of all the revival of the inner oneness between the poet and his work. . . . The poet shall create only when he must! The inner impulse shall be as strong as it was in primitive times. But it is to be a personal impulse, not a group impulse. The inner oneness of the poet with his work has been regained; his oneness with his public has been definitely lost. The primitive poet was a function of the group; the later poet was commissioned by one or many to record for them; the modern poet receives his summons from himself alone. Hence he faces a new and most difficult task: he must create not only his work but also his public. . . .

The union between the "occasion" and the poem has also

been reconstituted in the modern poet. The primitive stage has again been touched. But also with an essential difference. The primitive impulse of the poetic process was immediate and elemental. You must speak now or die! Such was the feeling of the prophets of the old covenant. To-day stimulus and actual expression are usually divided by a rather long period of development. For almost the normal age of man Goethe carried an experience in his heart, which finally received eternal form in his ballad of the pariah. In a word, all those phases of the poetic process that seem of most importance to the modern poet are of comparatively recent origin.

It goes without saying that what I mean here is the development of the completed inner image of his creative work. The poet's execution could at any period have demanded years of labor, and may, on the other hand, even now have a magic swiftness. . . . What we are concerned with is the inner labor.

The power of the poetic "occasion" to project itself effectively through years of the poet's life is the distinctive mark of the creative embryology of our age. . . . And what is it that takes place during this period of silent growth and ripening? The adaptation of the subjective experience to its objective form. The experience of the poet can no longer be uttered through an improvisation; he can no longer select a serviceable form in some treatise on poetics. He must wait until, amid the daily impressions of artistic forms, his experience assumes a form that shall make it communicable to other men. Not a form, assuredly, that shall lend it a popular triviality, but one that shall make the "confession" intimately accessible to the seeing soul that has lacked the experience to be communicated. The modern poet, in brief, is a man in whose soul a human experience wins an artistic form.

—*Die Weltliteratur im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert.*

HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

I

THE HIDDEN POET

It is beneath the dignity of poets, the dead and the living, to accept any praise but that true praise which is the confidence of living men. But the characteristic of our age is one of many meanings and wavering outlines. We rest upon shifting foundations; we know that to be insecure which our ancestors believed to be firm. A gentle but chronic dizziness vibrates among us. And there is much in this period of time that announces itself to but few, and much is lacking of which many believe that it is truly with us. Thus the poets might at times well ask themselves whether they truly exist for this time in which they are cast; whether, amid the worn and traditional praise that is flung them, there is anywhere being brought them the one true praise that befits their dignity—the confidence of living men, the acknowledgment of their leadership. But perhaps it is true (and it would be a beautiful truth and one worthy of an age that has stripped itself of all ostentation and all rhetoric), that precisely now this one true praise is being continually offered to our poets, but offered in a way so hidden and indirect that it requires some thought and some knowledge of the world to become aware of this hidden reckoning with the poet, the hidden yearning after him, this fleeing to the refuge of his power.

It is thus, if I do not err, that things are to-day. And my way of seeing all this forces me to shock you a little first of all. For I must assert that reading, this immoderate

habit, this monstrous sickness, if you will, of our time, which has been far too much abandoned to the statisticians and publishers' accountants, has its unregarded and far subtler aspects and expresses, indeed, nothing but an unassuagable yearning for the delights of poetry. This assertion will shock you, and you will reply that in no other epoch has poetry played so modest a part as it does in the reading matter of our time, and that it is lost amid the huge masses of books that people really read. You will tell me that my assertion may have been true of the listeners to the tales of Araby, or perhaps of the contemporaries of the "Princess de Clèves," or the generation of "Werther," but that it is surely least applicable to our age which is one of scientific handbooks and encyclopedias of useful knowledge and of innumerable periodicals in which there is no place for poetry. You will remind me that it is the women and the children who read plays and poems nowadays. But I have asked your permission to speak of things that do not lie wholly on the surface, and I would have us all reflect for a moment upon the wide difference of our reading from the reading of former times. This reading of ours seems to me noteworthy precisely as it is most restless, aimless and apparently irrational. We are immeasurably removed from the quiet lover of polite letters, from the old amateur of some popular science, from the reader of novels and memoirs in some earlier and calmer age. Precisely by virtue of its feverishness, its indiscriminateness, its unquiet wandering from book to book, its stirring and seeking, does the reading of our generation seem to me a function of our very lives, a noteworthy attitude in us, a symbolical gesture.

Almost do I see as the central gesture of our whole age man with a book in his hand, even as the kneeling man with folded hands was the symbol of another age. I am not, of course, thinking of those who desire to learn definite things from particular volumes. I speak of others who, always according to their stage of knowledge, read varied books, constantly changing them, never long at rest with one, driven by an uninterrupted and ever unstilled yearning. But the yearning of all such, it might seem, is not for the poet at all.

It is the man of science who can still their longing or, for the great majority, even the mere journalist. They read the newspapers rather even than books, and although they do not know just what they are seeking, yet it is surely not poetry, but shallow explanations of things to quiet the moment, groups of external facts, facile and apparently new "truths"—all the raw material of existence. I am repeating here what we all glibly say and superficially believe. But I think, nay, I know, that all this is but an appearance. For they seek more, they seek something different, these hundreds of thousands in their many thousands of books which they pass from hand to hand until the pages are soiled and tattered: they seek something far from these unrelated things, these air-spun, short-lived theories which one book after another offers them; they are seekers, but no dialetic has been granted them subtle enough to permit them to ask themselves and to say what they seek; they have no largeness of outlook and no synthetic power; the only means whereby they can express what happens within them is that one dumb and eloquent gesture with which they lay aside a book they have opened and turn to another. And this must be so continually: for they seek in book after book what the contents of none of these thousand books can give them; they seek something that hovers between the contents of all these individual books, something that may unite into one harmony the contents of them all. They devour the most realistic of all literatures and are seeking something intensely spiritual—that which, as by a magical transfusion of living blood, may unite their lives with the veins of the great life of the world. They seek in books what once they sought before fragrant altars, in the twilight of cathedrals which their yearning had taught to soar. They seek what is to unite them more powerfully than aught else with the world and at the same time take from them the world's heaviness. They seek a self, leaning upon which, their own selves may grow less disquieted. In a word, they seek all the enchantment of poetry. But it is not their affair to account accurately for themselves, nor to know that it is the poet for whom they are looking behind the journal-

ist and the ephemeral writer. For wherever they seek they find. The novelist who delights them, the journalist who gives a savor to their daily lives and casts the sharp lights of larger existence across their morning and their evening path—truly I have neither the courage nor the desire to separate these from the poet. I know no penny-a-liner, not the most wretched of his trade, upon whose productions, unworthy of that light though they may be, there does not fall something of the poet's radiance, when these productions are seen by an eye wholly unspoiled, by an imagination throttled through the dryness and the hardship of life. And that is so, simply because that scribbler uses, however ineptly, the most marvellous of all instruments—a living speech. To be sure, he humiliates himself by robbing that language of as much of its nobility, its radiance, its life as he can; but he can never impoverish it so utterly but that some broken rhythms, some combinations of words which, in his own despite, he commands, or some images which his scribbling disgraces while it displays them—but that these may not fall like magic beams into some quite young, some quite crude soul. . . .

And now, having touched upon the great mystery of speech, I have suddenly revealed the goal to which I would lead you. It is by virtue of language that the poet from his secret places rules a world whose single members may deny him and may even have forgotten his existence. And yet it is he who leads their thoughts together or leads them apart, who rules and nurses their imagination, and by whose grace even their whimsies and their maddest pranks are ruled. Like all genuine forces this silent sorcery works inexorably. For everything that is written in a language and everything, I dare to assert, that is thought in it, derives from the products of those few who have ever dealt with that language creatively. And all that which, in the widest sense, we call literature, down to the libretto of an old-fashioned opera and the paper-backed novel—all derives from the few great books of the world. The descent has been degraded, it has been distorted by indiscriminate crossings to the point of grotesqueness, but it is a descent in the direct line. And

so it is really the poets, and ever the poets alone, it is the words that they have forever united or by some antithesis forever separated, the figures and situations by which they have symbolized the eternal happening—it is still the poets with whom the imagination of the hundred thousands is concerned. The man on the omnibus who has his half-read paper under his workingman's smock, the shop assistant and the little seamstress who lend each other cheap novels, and all the innumerable readers of worthless books—is it not strange to reflect that even these, somehow, in those hours in which their eyes pass over the dark lines of print, are busy with the poets, suffer the violence of the poets, of those solitary souls whose existence they do not suspect and from whose authentic productions so deep an abyss severs them and their kind! It is the spirituality of the poets, their warmth binding to each other the atoms that would fly asunder, it is their magic alone that holds these books together and makes of each a separate world and an island upon which the imagination may dwell. Without this magic which gives them an appearance of form, these books would fall to fragments and would be dead matter after which not the hand of the meanest would be stretched out.

Thousands of hands grasp continually after those books in which science has heaped up the harvest of its laborious days and nights. These books, above all, seem to have made adepts of the finer and more coherent minds. And am I going too far if once again I assert that here too I discover a hidden yearning for the poet, a yearning which as perverse as many impulses of love, pretends to hold itself averted from the object of its secret wishes and to flee from it forever? Surely, surely, it is only those few who work within a given science who seek its true character, its stern and limited existence surrounded by an abyss of eternal cold! The unproved, seeking souls of the multitude would find this cold so terrible that it would scorch them and drive them forever from its place!

That there are men who can live in an air sered by the coldness of unending space, this is a secret of the spirit, a secret like that of the poets who are able to live under the

pressure of all the gathered and present experience of mankind. But it is not for the multitude and cannot be for it. For men and women are in the midst of life and from science, taken in its stern and pure sense, no path leads back to life. There is a striving in all the arts to become pure art, and this striving has been expressed by the saying, which must not be taken for more than a figure of speech, that they strive to become music. And so in each science there lives the striving to purify itself into mathematics. And this, if you please, is still the one human thing in the sciences, their permanent spiritualization by humanity: for thus they seek to carry into the universe the subjective calculations of the race, and man, as in the old saying, remains the measure of all things. But even thus the path leads to the icy and the solitary. And the crowd who takes up books of science again and again is not impelled toward the burning frosts of eternity; its members are no adepts and must forever remain with all their seething questions in the outer courts. For the objects of their yearning are the connective emotions, the cosmic emotions, the emotions stirred by thought, precisely those which a true and stringent science must always deny itself and which the poet alone can give. They who snatch the books of science and even of pseudo-science, even as those others who grasp after novels or newspapers or any printed rag, do so because they would not stand shivering in their nakedness under the stars. They yearn for what only the poet can give them when he throws over that nakedness the folds of his garment. And poetic creation, as Hebbel says somewhere in his journals, is throwing the world around one like a mantel that will warm us. Of this warmth the multitude would partake; for its sake they would snare for themselves fragments of the poetic power, when they imagine that they pay homage to science. Their mind is set upon a feeling thought, an intellectualized emotion, upon a mediation between them and all that science, in its great renunciation, accepts as forever unapproachable to the needs of man. But they seek the poet and they name him not.

—*Der Dichter und diese Zeit.*

II

THE POET AND HIS HEARER

NEVER again will an awakened age demand of its poets, either of individuals or of them collectively, an expression of itself in exhausting eloquence, an accounting drawn up in intelligible formulæ. The century through which we are struggling has wrought us phenomena too strong, has stirred up too mightily the masked dance of mute apparitions; too powerfully have the wordless secrets of nature and the still shadow of the past swept in upon us. An awakened age will make more and more mystical demands. A tremendous process has stamped anew the experience of the poet and also the experience of him for whom the poet exists—the individual. The poet and he for whom poetry exists no longer resemble figures from any past era. I will not say how much more they seem to resemble the priest and the true believer, or the beloved and the lover, in the Platonic sense, or the enchanter and the enchanted. For these comparisons hide as much as they reveal of an intangible relation, in which the buried magics of all these relationships mingle with still other nameless elements which belong to the present day alone.

But this intangible relation exists. The book is here, full of its power over the soul, over the senses. It is here and it whispers where the light is to be obtained from life, and how pleasure runs its course, how leadership of men is won and how the hour of death should be borne. The book exists and within it the conception of wisdom and the conception of seduction. There it lies and is silent or speaks, and is so much the more ambiguous, more dangerous, more mysterious in that everything is more ambiguous, more powerful, more mysterious in this immeasurably intangible and, in the highest sense, poetic age. There is no meaning in making a cheap antithesis and contrasting books with real life. For if books were not an element of life, a highly equivocal, volatile, perilous, magical element of life, then they would be nothing at all, and it would be wasting breath

to speak of them. But in the hand of each of us they are something different, and they come to life only when they combine with a living soul. They do not speak, they answer rather; this makes of them a demoniac force. The time is yet to come for their synthesis, but in a thousand dark hours these fountain-springs, welling up from the deep, are not denied to the individual, and I am no longer sure, when I regard these things in their secret, more beautiful connection, whether I may still speak of "sorry offspring," where continuously, after barren times, things born of the spirit work in turn upon the spirit. Never before have seekers brought themselves so completely to the written poem: as upon the poets themselves, so there lies upon them the compulsion to leave nothing outside. It is wrestling, a chaos which struggles for breath within these who bend with greedy eyes over the book as well as in those who have brought forth the books. In the readers of whom I speak (the individuals, unusual, and yet not so unusual as one might think) all darkness would be banished as in a living bath, all discords be forgotten, everything would forever be united. For them also, as for the creating artist, the spirit liberates itself from the material substance, not by despising it, but rather by grasping hold of it with such intensity that it forces its way out. To them also in their most exalted moments nothing is remote, nothing near, no phase of the soul beyond reach, no baseness base. It befalls them, as it does the poet, and their breathings in such moments are of creative force. They read at such times, which are great events and which cannot occur at will, nothing in which they do not believe, just as the poets cannot bear to produce anything in which they do not believe. I say, "believe," and I say it in a profounder sense than that with which, I fear, it rings out to you in the haste of this discourse. I do not mean it as the losing of one's self in the fantastic enchantment of the versified word, as self-forgetfulness over a book, a short and a superficial fascination. What I mean to say is just the opposite: I mean it in its full religious significance; as a faith in the truth over and above all appearance of reality, a holding fast and being held in the

depths of one's soul, a resting from the whirl of existence. Thus the poets believe what they fashion and fashion what they believe. The universe is crumbling away, but their visions are for them the points which uphold the edifice of the world. But to accept this word vision as I give it, not to connect it with any preconceived idea, to include under this conception the true penetration of mere matter as well as a vast, comprehensive view of cosmic happenings—this I must leave to you, for you sit before me, many people, and I do not know to whom I speak; but I speak only for those who wish to follow me and not for him who has promised himself to remain aloof. I can appeal only to those for whom poetry exists, through whose own being the poet first acquires life. For he is ever the answerer only and without questioners he who replies is a shadow. To be sure, we are concerned above all with life and the living, our interest is for the men and women of this age, the only ones who are real to us; for whose sake suns have been burnt out, and new suns have fashioned themselves, for whose sake prehistoric ages existed and immense forests, and countless animals; for whose sake Rome fell and Carthage was destroyed, that they might live to-day and breathe as they do live and breathe, and be wrapped around in this living flesh, the moisture of their eyes beaming in them, and their hair and their brows formed just as they are formed. It is they with whom we are concerned, their pains, their pleasures, their embraces and their isolations. But it is a thoughtless antithesis to contrast these, the living, with written poetry as with something foreign to them, since poetry is, indeed, nothing but a function of the living. For it does not live, it *is* lived. To those, however, who have once experienced a thousand pages of Dostoyevsky and who have entered into the personality of Ottilie in the "Elective Affinities," or have lived a poem of Goethe or a poem of Stephan George, to these I say nothing estranging when I speak of this experience as a religious experience, the only religious experience possibly, of which they were ever conscious. But this experience cannot be dissected nor described. One can recall it, but one cannot bring it close to

those who have never been touched by it. Whoever understands how to read, reads believingly, for he rests his soul upon the vision. He keeps none of himself apart. For one enchanted instant everything is equally near to him, everything equally remote, for he feels in touch with all things. Nothing of the past has been lost to him and the future has nothing greater to offer. He is for one magic moment the conqueror of time. Wherever he may be, everything is within reach and every particle of discord is dissolved. The single thing for him becomes the many, for he sees it symbolically, indeed the one is for him the universal and he is happy without the sting of hope. He does not lose himself; he possesses himself completely for that single instant; he equals the full measure of himself.

—*Der Dichter und diese Zeit.*

RICHARD MUELLER-FREIENFELS

CREATIVE ART IN LIFE

1. To THE modern mind, trained in the biological sciences, it is no longer possible to present art as a gift of the gods to mortals and as having nothing in common with ordinary life. Equally fallacious is the wide-spread opinion that creative literature is a dispensable luxury or a diversion which, however praiseworthy, stands in opposition to life. Were literature nothing more than that, it would be difficult to understand why no people on earth has ever been able to dispense with it, and why men of the highest general endowment have dedicated themselves wholly to its pursuit. No, literature is deeply rooted and intertwined with life's totality and its fruits produce a seed that gives birth to new forces in the practical world. For literature, like all the aesthetic functions, is a completion and a necessary completion of the practical life. It stands on the same ground as the other arts and as play, and like these its biological value consists in its employment of talents and faculties which would else be unused and become atrophied through the one-sidedness that all practical life entails. It is by virtue of art alone that man can develop into that "totality" which was the human ideal of Schiller. Modern scientists, moreover, have shown physiologically and biologically, in what exact ways aesthetic activity achieves that harmonious cultivation of the whole organism which the life process demands.

Thus we divide life into two great realms: First there is the practical side, the activities of which are directed toward purely external aims, and secondly there is the aesthetic life which has no aims that lie outside of itself, but carries its own inherent value and expresses itself biologically through

the exercise of organs and functions that would be uncultivated but for it. The exercise of these organs and functions is accompanied by pleasurable emotions. To the practical life belong nearly all the vocational activities of man; to the aesthetic life belong play, pure science and art. We do not regard art, as has often been done, as a species of play; we place art beside play. The two have much in common. But we speak of art only where human activity is directed to the production of creative work or where human receptivity strives to make such a work its own. On the higher cultural levels we always find this division into artist and audience. But what is truly common to all the aesthetic functions is that they are a necessary completion of the practical life, that they awaken feelings of pleasure and thus intensify and heighten the consciousness of life. But since, as a rule, they follow no practical purposes, they stand without the ordinary, practical coil of living, and from this fact arises the well-recognized aloofness and self-sustaining power of all the aesthetic functions to which Kant's definition of the "disinterested" has often been applied. Hence we call such works works of art that are calculated to afford us aesthetic experiences—experiences that are aloof from external aims, that complete the practical life and are accompanied by emotions of pleasure. It is to be observed, of course, that in the world of reality this theoretical cleavage between practical and aesthetic functions is rarely quite complete. Practical activities are at times accompanied by a certain aesthetic satisfaction; artistic activities are often blended with extra-aesthetic elements.

2. What obviously differentiates literature from the other arts is the circumstance that it communicates aesthetic experiences through the medium of language. We must remember, however, that language is merely a means of expression and never the actual material of the aesthetic experience as tones are in music. Language, as a phenomenon of acoustics, has not nearly the same importance in poetry as tones have in music: in most literature the true significance lies in the images, feelings, passions, volitional stimuli which are merely communicated by means of this acoustic

phenomenon and which, in music, are quite secondary. That is not true, in an equal degree, of all kinds of poetry. In the lyric, language as a phenomenon of acoustics plays a far more important part than in the novel. It is there usually more than a mere medium of expression. Everywhere in language there inheres this dualism of its acoustic-motor aspect and those meanings, that is to say, those spiritual experiences which are liberated by the acoustic-motor element. In all good works of art this dualism is unobtrusive, since here the two aspects of language have been blended into a complete oneness of effect. Nevertheless, we can never call literature an art of speech in the same sense in which we can call music an art of tones. Nor is it correct to reduce the dualism of language and of the spiritual experiences which it communicates to the old distinction between form and content. We shall show hereafter that creative form includes, above all, the entire circle of meanings. Hence we can define the place of literature in life's totality simply by saying: Literature, by means of language, generates in us spiritual experiences that complete and enrich life. It need merely be added that the experiences communicated by imaginative literature are apt to be less purely aesthetic than those communicated through the other arts. They are, of course, predominantly so. But since the raw material of poetic creation is derived from common and hence generally practical life, extra-aesthetic elements, above all ethical, religious, etc., play an important part.

3. Thus literature is concerned with the enrichment of life. This is the common purpose of all creative literature as it addresses itself to man. No divergence of opinion appears until one inquires into precisely what is meant by enrichment. For the experiences communicated by literature do not, as in music, stand wholly apart from life, but gain their content from its very stuff. There arises the question, which has been the subject of many a heated controversy, whether literature is to bring as its enrichment only a quantitative broadening and increase of the life common to all men, or whether it is to effect a qualitative

change, intensification and heightening. This question is forever returning in different forms. Men demand at one time the greatest naturalness, the most exact imitation; at other times art is valued precisely for the changes which it makes in the raw material of reality. Let me call the tendency which aims at the most faithful representation of life and seeks to produce in literature something that shall be qualitatively equivalent to reality, a broadening of life. If, on the other hand, literature aims at a qualitative transformation of its raw material and neglects imitative exactness for the sake of definite changes, I shall call that a heightening of life.

It is easy to see that both of these tendencies have always been present in art, that each has sustained itself by the side of the other, but that they have often been in an attitude of mutual hostility. The mere broadening of life is usually designated by the term naturalism. This form of art gives us representations which rest on exactly the same basis as the common life of every day. That kind of art, on the other hand, which aims at a heightening and intensification of life, and hence reworks its substance into something quite new, we may for the present call idealistic or stylistic art. There is still a third kind of art, namely romantic art. It is not concerned with a broadening of life, but flees by preference from common things. It seeks its novelty, however, only in its substance, in the choice of things distant in time and space. But it does not seek, like idealistic art, to transform the character of things. Thus romantic art is unrealistic. It denies common life, but only as substance and does not strive to create life in a new form.

But even as we define these three types of art, we are bound to admit that the boundaries that divide them are never very exact or sharp. Goethe began largely as a naturalist. Through conscious study of the art of the Greeks he developed that idealistic method which we admire in his "Iphigenie." By its side, however, are found works of his that are strongly romantic. And indeed, several of these literary tendencies will often be found blended in the same work. Thus we find in the same work both naturalism

and romanticism, a further proof that these two kinds differ from each other only in their choice of subject matter. One need merely think of E. T. A. Hoffmann or of Zola, both of whom mix the boldest romanticism with their naturalism. But although mixed forms and transitional forms exist, it is never difficult to tell in a given case which of these three tendencies has dominated an individual writer. It is not the duty of the psychologist or the critic to condemn any one of these tendencies. Each has always sustained itself by the side of the other two, and no violence of criticism has affected it. And whatever has such power of persistence has earned its right to be. And indeed, the more closely one analyses the different tendencies of art, the more their fundamental differences seem to disappear or to become merely differences of degree, so that even in naturalism and romanticism one finds certain idealising elements which have simply not reached the point of conscious and clear unfoldment.

—*Poetik.*

ALFRED KERR

THE CRITIC AS CREATOR

. . . I DEMAND this of the true critic: "Let him give th criticism of hate and of love, tempered by historic justic Like the King of Israel, let him love two things—the slin and the harp."

These, I believe, are the symbolical implements of th critic—the sling and the harp.

In the dreams of the day and of the night these tw hover before his vision—the sling and the harp.

Hatred and love are better than likes and dislikes. Th contemplation of any work of art leads to an unconscio addition. Imagine the force of the good and the bad sing impressions to be stated in terms of numbers. The critic mood depends upon the size of these numbers, his judgme upon their sums. Nothing is significant until it has be dissected into its spiritual elements. To do this is the mo serious task of criticism. Thus criticism may give both the arbitrary and the objective. The personal element mu lie in the presentation, the objective in the ultimate valu tion. Criticism should seek to envisage a work of art as t historian of literature will envisage it in twenty-five year but let not critics be ashamed of their most spontaneo impulses—the impulses of hatred and of love. For criticis is an art, no science. . . .

1. I offer criticisms in living speech.

2. They seek to disengage the trait of eternity.

3. Their aim is to light torches; and to illuminate wh kinds by exhibiting the force of an example through select traits.

4. I am grateful to anyone who grasps the fact that artistic form of bright serenity does not conceal an emp

fribble; it may conceal a fighter of the spirit. The dull seriousness that usually wins people's respect is not a better ethos. It is impotence. . . .

5. The inner form of my criticism is concision.

It would rather be extract than lemonade; it would rather operate with a flash-light than with a string of oil wicks. It must have the power of building up a man's portrait in a few pages. Conciseness is the form of the future, the postulate of an age (in so far as it is not that of a temperament) which is richer, more winged, passionate in its haste. *Eheu, fugaces, Postume, Postume, labuntur anni!*

6. I have no desire to follow streams of tendency; I would dissect souls. I have never had the intention of writing a book concerning the progress of a movement, always of recording in permanent form the soul of a man. . . .

8. Thus I aim after the essential, not the complete. There are no chapters on The Weavers or Hannele or The Beaver-coat of Hauptmann—no chapters on the thrice-discussed. The innermost being of the man is to shine through the sections of which he is the subject.

9. One who is only an impressionist may perish of his critical futility. From what is said of a particular play, for instance, there should arise a profounder understanding of the nature of the theatre, of the character of dramatic effects. Mere impressionism is not enough. There are objective demands.

10. The critic may laughingly receive the reproach of mannerism. What is mannerism? Every form of presentation that seems best and inevitable to the author; every style whose melody sounds in the author before the crowd is accustomed to its rhythm. Every new phenomenon in literature demands a new technique of reading. Each one (a criticism that seeks to crystalize no less than others) asks that such a technique be formed.

What, then, is mannerism? A deficiency in the reader. . . .

12. I would put an end to the stupid distinction: this man is no creator, but a critic.

The true critic is always in my vision of him a poet, a "maker." And it makes almost no very great difference

whether he creates a serious author or an amusingly ba one. Even as a poet may be almost equally great in the ac of creating a Falstaff or a great hero. For the poet, too draws his figures from life. Imagination is memory. H is a constructor. And the critic is a constructor of con structors. He analyzes the being of an author, causes th author's innermost nature to arise before us; he reproduce the kernel of the man's brain, sets the whole reproduce figure (in his vision of it) on its two legs and bids hi creature to go forth!

The true critic is ever a poet, a creator.

13. Why does one review certain things? Because on believes that sometimes a decent review has a better chanc of lasting than a shoddy play. Why drive the reviewer' trade? For the reviewer's sake. Neither for the sake o the public nor of the "author."

The critic contemplates poets as the poet contemplate men. He contemplates poets as tragic or semi-tragic o quaintly amusing members of the family of man—as huma beings who create, even as others only experience. He con templates that part of their experience which is embodied a creation. He writes a great work whose heroes are all poets (Ah, if only they were all poets!) And that work is a wor of creation. Expression, structure, the grasp upon a huma being—all are mine. Assuredly the critic shows his creature as they are, measured by those norms which for certai ages the Caucasian races have used to declare a thing grea or bungling. He makes something of them. Robert Schu mann said of the critics that "they were not to imagin themselves the gods of artists who could, if they pleased let them starve." He meant the false critics. For it is a accident, O poets, that we choose you. We are not de pendent on this subject rather than another. Enter there fore into the work of the critic as into a house of the errin —as into a house of man. Behold the creatures of th critic; behold them shape their artificial manikins. Behol their contortions, their swollen dullness, their attempte cheating, their pallor of defeat! And behold the happy few the creators—tragic even in their victory. Behold these fe

selling their own blood and their forth-streaming life for the visions of their art, for these phantoms by the grace of their poor souls, for puppets, vampires. . . . Behold!

14. To be a critic, if you are nothing beyond that, is a stupid vocation. Derivative doctrines grow stale faster than this morning's buns. There is value, I believe, only in such criticism as constitutes a work of art in itself, so that it can still affect men when its contents have grown false and its subjects mildewed. Criticism is to be viewed as a creative kind.

Ah, if criticism were a science! But the imponderable elements are too strong. It is, at its best, an art. And it will become greater as it grows more an art. Think of the sublime Lessing. His doctrine of the transitory moment seems nonsense to-day; his doctrine of catharsis is empty talk, based on a misunderstanding of Aristotle. But the way in which he expressed both—that is immortal. It is the art in the critic that lives on. What is productive criticism? No critic has ever yet produced, ever yet begotten a poet! Productive criticism creates a work of art in criticism. Every other interpretation is empty. And only he among critics has the right to approach a poet who is himself one.

15. Thus in criticism one must not only speak truth—that is, indeed, a presupposition—but in the embodiment of truth one must build a work of art, beget beauty, create form. Only such criticism is productive. It is production. Here the critic occupies a point where all differences between his craft and the craft of the official poet cease. He is no longer a living antithesis of the front line of the poetic army. He is within, one in kind with his fellows, the representative of a department of creative art. The men at whom his art aims, the objects of his creative activity are poets. This is the only possible sense of the chatter concerning productive criticism—namely, that criticism is in itself production. . . .

17. The critic of the future will say: I have no desire to be a serf ordering the ranks in the crowd of the moderately gifted, the ungifted and of those very few whom I regard

as standing above me. I would, at times, be the herald o these few. Not as their creature, but as their kinsman.

18. The critic of the future will in general hold fast t this truth: to build systems is only to invite dizziness; per manence belongs only to what has been well said.

—*Das neue Drama.*

PART THREE

GEORGE MOORE

THE VILLA AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

RESPECTABILITY has wound itself about society, a sort of octopus, and nowhere are you quite free from one of its horrible suckers. The power of the villa residence is supreme: art, science, politics, religion, it has transformed to suit its requirements. The villa goes to the Academy, the villa goes to the theatre, and therefore the art of to-day is mildly realistic; not the great realism of idea, but the puny reality of materialism; not the deep poetry of a Peter de Hogue, but the meanness of a Frith—not the winged realism of Balzac, but the degrading naturalism of a coloured photograph.

To my mind there is no sadder spectacle of artistic debauchery than a London theatre; the overfed inhabitants of the villa in the stalls hoping for gross excitement to assist them through their hesitating digestions; an ignorant mob in the pit and gallery forgetting the miseries of life in imbecile stories reeking of the sentimentality of the back stairs. Were other ages as coarse and as common as ours? It is difficult to imagine Elizabethan audiences as not more intelligent than those that applaud Mr. Pettit's plays. Impossible that an audience that could sit out Edward II. could find any pleasure in such sinks of literary infamies as *In the Ranks* and *Harbour Lights*. Artistic atrophy is benumbing us, we are losing our finer feeling for beauty, the rose is going back to the briar. I will not speak of the fine old crusted stories, ever the same, on which every drama is based, nor yet of the musty characters with which they are peopled—the miser in the old castle counting his gold by night, the dishevelled woman whom he keeps for ambiguous reasons confined in a cellar. Let all this be waived. We must not quarrel with the ingredients. The miser and

the old castle are as true, and not one jot more true, tha the million events which go to make up the phenomena human existence. Not at these things considered separatel do I take umbrage, but at the miserable use that is mad of them, the vulgarity of the complications evolved fro them, and the poverty of beauty in the dialogue.

Not the thing itself, but the idea of the thing evokes th idea. Schopenhauer was right; we do not want the thin but the idea of the thing. The thing itself is worthless; an the moral writers who embellish it with pious ornamentatio are just as reprehensible as Zola, who embellishes it wit erotic arabesques. You want the idea drawn out of obscu ing matter, this can best be done by the symbol. The sym bol, or the thing itself, that is the great artistic questio In earlier ages it was the symbol; a name, a plume, suffice to evoke the idea; now we evoke nothing, for we giv everything; the imagination of the spectator is no long called into play. In Shakespeare's days to create wealth a theatre it was only necessary to write upon a board, " magnificent apartment in a palace." This was no dou primitive and not a little barbarous, but it was better b far than by dint of anxious archæology to construct th Doge's palace upon the stage. By one rich pillar, by son projecting balustrade taken in conjunction with a moore gondola, we should strive to evoke the soul of the city Veronese: by the magical and unequalled selection of subtle and unexpected feature of a thought or aspect of landscape, and not by the up-piling of extraneous deta are all great poetic efforts achieved.

> "By the tideless dolorous inland sea,
> In a land of sand, of ruin, and gold."

And, better example still,

> *"Dieu que le son du cor est triste au fond des bois,"*

that impeccable, that only line of real poetry Alfred Vigny ever wrote; and being a great poet Shakespeare co

sciously or unconsciously observed more faithfully than any other poet these principles of art; and, as is characteristic of the present day, nowhere do we find these principles so grossly violated as in the representation of his plays. I had painful proof of this some few nights after my arrival in London. I had never seen Shakespeare acted, and I went to the Lyceum and there I saw that exquisite love song—for *Romeo and Juliet* is no more than a love song in dialogue—tricked out in silks and carpets and illuminated building, a vulgar bawd suited to the gross passion of an ignorant public. I hated all that with the hatred of a passionate heart, and I longed for a simple stage, a few simple indications, and the simple recitation of that story of the sacrifice of the two white souls for the reconciliation of two great families. My hatred did not reach to the age of the man who played the boy-lover, but to the offensiveness with which he thrust his individuality upon me, longing to realize the poet's divine imagination: and the woman, too, I wished with my whole soul away, subtle and strange though she was, and I yearned for her part to be played by a youth as in old time: a youth cunningly disguised, would be a symbol; and my mind would be free to imagine the divine Juliet of the poet, whereas I could but dream of the bright eyes and delicate mien and motion of the woman who had thrust herself between me and it.

But not with symbol and subtle suggestion has the villa to do, but with such stolid, intellectual fare as corresponds to its material wants. The villa has not time to think, the villa is the working bee. The tavern is the drone. It has no boys to put to school, no neighbours to study, and is therefore a little more refined, or, should I say? depraved, in its taste. The villa in one form or other has always existed, and always will exist so long as our present social system holds together. It is the basis of life, and more important than the tavern. Agreed: but that does not say that the tavern was not an excellent corrective influence to the villa, and that its disappearance has not had a vulgarising effect on artistic work of all kinds, and the club has been proved impotent to replace it, the club being no more

than the correlative of the villa. Let the reader trace villa through each modern feature. I will pass on at once to the circulating library, at once the symbol and glory of villaism.

The subject is not unfamiliar to me; I come to it like the son to his father, like the bird to its nest. Singularly inappropriate comparison, but I am in such excellent humour to-day; humour is everything. It is said that the tiger will sometimes play with the lamb! Let us play.) We have the villa well in our mind. The father who goes to the city in the morning, the grown-up girls waiting to be married, the big drawing-room where they play waltz music, and talk of dancing parties. But waltzes will not entirely suffice nor even tennis; the girls must read. Mother cannot keep a censor (it is as much as she can do to keep a cook, housemaid, and page-boy), besides the expense would be enormous, even if nothing but shilling and two-shilling novels were purchased. Out of such circumstances the circulating library was hatched.

The villa made known its want, and art fell on its knees. Pressure was put on the publishers, and books were published at 31*s.* 6*d.*; the dirty, outside public was got rid of and the villa paid its yearly subscription, and had nice large handsome books that none but the *élite* could obtain, and with them a sense of being put on a footing of equality with my Lady This and Lady That, and certainty that nothing would come into the hands of dear Kate and Mary and Maggie that they might not read, and all for two guineas a year. English fiction became pure, and the garlic and assafœtida with which Byron, Fielding, and Ben Jonson so liberally seasoned their works, and in spite of which, as critics say, they were geniuses, have disappeared from our literature. English fiction became pure, dirty stories were to be heard no more, were no longer procurable. But at this point human nature intervened; poor human nature! when you pinch it in one place it bulges out in another, after the fashion of a lady's figure. Human nature has from the earliest time shown a liking for dirty stories; dirty stories have formed a substantial part of every literature (I employ the words "dirty stories" in the circulating library

sense); therefore a taste for dirty stories may be said to be inherent in the human animal. Call it a disease if you will —an incurable disease—which, if it is driven inwards, will break out in an unexpected quarter in a new form and with redoubled virulence. This is exactly what has happened. Actuated by the most laudable motives, Mudie cut off our rations of dirty stories, and for forty years we were apparently the most moral people on the face of the earth. It was confidently asserted that an English woman of sixty would not read what would bring the blush of shame to the cheeks of a maiden of any other nation. But humiliation and sorrow were awaiting Mudie. True it is that we still continued to subscribe to his library, true it is that we still continued to go to church, true it is that we turned our faces away when *Mdlle. de Maupin* or the *Assommoir* was spoken of; to all appearance we were as good and chaste as even Mudie might wish us; and no doubt he looked back upon his forty years of effort with pride; no doubt he beat his manly breast and said, "I have scorched the evil one out of the villa; the head of the serpent is crushed for evermore"; but lo, suddenly, with all the horror of an earthquake, the slumbrous law courts awoke, and the burning cinders of fornification and the blinding and suffocating smoke of adultery were poured upon and hung over the land. Through the mighty columns of our newspapers the terrible lava rolled unceasing, and in the black stream the villa, with all its beautiful illusions, tumbled and disappeared.

—*Confessions of a Young Man.*

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

I

THE SOURCES OF IDEALISM

LET us imagine a community of a thousand persons organized for the perpetuation of the species on the basis o the British family as we know it at present. Seven hundre of them, we will suppose, find the British family arrange ment quite good enough for them. Two hundred and ninety nine find it a failure, but must put up with it since the are in a minority. The remaining person occupies a positio to be explained presently. The 299 failures will not hav the courage to face the fact that they are irremediable fai ures, since they cannot prevent the 700 satisfied ones fror coercing them into conformity with the marriage law. The will accordingly try to persuade themselves that, whateve their own particular domestic arrangements may be, th family is a beautiful and holy natural institution. For th fox not only declares that the grapes he cannot get ar sour: he also insists that the sloes he *can* get are swee Now observe what has happened. The family as it reall is is a conventional arrangement, legally enforced, which th majority, because it happens to suit them, think good enoug for the minority, whom it happens not to suit at all. Th family as a beautiful and holy natural institution is only fancy picture of what every family would have to be everybody was to be suited, invented by the minority as mask for the reality, which in its nakedness is intolerabl to them. We call this sort of fancy picture an Ideal; an the policy of forcing individuals to an act on the assumptio that all ideals are real, and to recognize and accept suc

action as standard moral conduct, absolutely valid under all circumstances, contrary conduct or any advocacy of it being discountenanced and punished as immoral, may therefore be described as the policy of Idealism. Our 299 domestic failures are therefore become idealists as to marriage; and in proclaiming the ideal in fiction, poetry, pulpit and platform oratory, and serious private conversation, they will far outdo the 700 who comfortably accept marriage as a matter of course, never dreaming of calling it an "institution," much less a holy and beautiful one, and being pretty plainly of opinion that Idealism is a crackbrained fuss about nothing. The idealists, hurt by this, will retort by calling them Philistines. We then have our society classified as 700 Philistines and 299 idealists, leaving one man unclassified: the man strong enough to face the truth the idealists are shirking.

Such a man says of marriage, "The thing is a failure for many of us. It is insufferable that two human beings, having entered into relations which only warm affection can render tolerable, should be forced to maintain them after such affections have ceased to exist, or in spite of the fact that they have never arisen. The alleged natural attractions and repulsions upon which the family ideal is based do not exist; and it is historically false that the family was founded for the purpose of satisfying them. Let us provide otherwise for the social ends which the family subserves, and then abolish its compulsory character altogether." What will be the attitude of the rest to this outspoken man? The Philistines will simply think him mad. But the idealists will be terrified beyond measure at the proclamation of their hidden thought—at the presence of the traitor among the conspirators of silence—at the rending of the beautiful veil they and their poets have woven to hide the unbearable face of the truth. They will crucify him, burn him, violate their own ideals of family affection by taking his children away from him, ostracize him, brand him as immoral, profligate, filthy, and appeal against him to the despised Philistines, specially idealized for the occasion as Society. How far they will proceed against him depends on how far his courage exceeds theirs. At his

worst, they call him cynic and paradoxer: at his best they do their utmost to ruin him, if not to take his life. Thus, purblindly courageous moralists like Mandeville and La Rochefoucauld, who merely state unpleasant facts without denying the validity of current ideals, and who indeed depend on those ideals to make their statements piquant, get off with nothing worse than this name of cynic, the free use of which is a familiar mark of the zealous idealist. But take the case of the man who has already served us as an example: Shelley. The idealists did not call Shelley a cynic: they called him a fiend until they invented a new illusion to enable them to enjoy the beauty of his lyrics, this illusion being nothing less than the pretence that since he was at bottom an idealist himself, his ideals must be identical with those of Tennyson and Longfellow, neither of whom ever wrote a line in which some highly respectable ideal was not implicit.

Here the admission that Shelley, the realist, was an idealist, too, seems to spoil the whole argument. And it certainly spoils its verbal consistency. For we unfortunately use this word ideal indifferently to denote both the institution which the ideal masks and the mask itself, thereby producing desperate confusion of thought, since the institution may be an effete and poisonous one, whilst the mask may be, and indeed generally is, an image of what we would fain have in its place. If the existing facts, with their masks on, are to be called ideals, and the future possibilities which the masks depict are also to be called ideals—if, again, the man who is defending existing institutions by maintaining their identity with their masks is to be confounded under one name with the man who is striving to realize the future possibilities by tearing the mask and the thing masked asunder, then the position cannot be intelligibly described by mortal pen: you and I, reader, will be at cross purposes at every sentence unless you allow me to distinguish pioneers like Shelley and Ibsen as realists from the idealists of my imaginary community of one thousand. If you ask why I have not allotted the terms the other way, and called Shelley and Ibsen idealists and the conventionalists realists,

I reply that Ibsen himself, though he has not formally made the distinction, has so repeatedly harped on conventions and conventionalists as ideals and idealists that if I were now perversely to call them realities and realists, I should confuse readers of The Wild Duck and Rosmersholm more than I should help them. Doubtless I shall be reproached for puzzling people by thus limiting the meaning of the term ideal. But what, I ask, is that inevitable passing perplexity compared to the inextricable tangle I must produce if I follow the custom, and use the word indiscriminately in its two violently incompatible senses? If the term realist is objected to on account of some of its modern associations, I can only recommend you, if you must associate it with something else than my own description of its meaning (I do not deal in definitions), to associate it, not with Zola and Maupassant, but with Plato.

Now let us return to our community of 700 Philistines, 299 idealists, and 1 realist. The mere verbal ambiguity against which I have just provided is as nothing beside that which comes of any attempt to express the relations of these three sections, simple as they are, in terms of the ordinary systems of reason and duty. The idealist, higher in the ascent of evolution than the Philistine, yet hates the highest and strikes at him with a dread and rancor of which the easy-going Philistine is guiltless. The man who has risen above the danger and the fear that his acquisitiveness will lead him to theft, his temper to murder, and his affections to debauchery: this is he who is denounced as an arch-scoundrel and libertine, and thus confounded with the lowest because he is the highest. And it is not the ignorant and stupid who maintain this error, but the literate and the cultured. When the true prophet speaks, he is proved to be both rascal and idiot, not by those who have never read of how foolishly such learned demonstrations have come off in the past, but by those who have themselves written volumes on the crucifixions, the burnings, the stonings, the headings and hangings, the Siberia transportations, the calumny and ostracism which have been the lot of the pioneer as well as of the camp follower. It is from men

of established literary reputation that we learn that William Blake was mad, that Shelley was spoiled by living in a low set, that Robert Owen was a man who did not know the world, that Ruskin was incapable of comprehending political economy, that Zola was a mere blackguard, and that Ibsen was "a Zola with a wooden leg." The great musician, accepted by the unskilled listener, is vilified by his fellow-musicians: it was the musical culture of Europe that pronounced Wagner the inferior of Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer. The great artist finds his foes among the painters, and not among the men in the street: it was the Royal Academy which placed forgotten nobodies above Burne-Jones. It is not rational that it should be so; but it is so, for all that.

The realist at last loses patience with ideals altogether, and sees in them only something to blind us, something to numb us, something to murder self in us, something whereby, instead of resisting death, we can disarm it by committing suicide. The idealist, who has taken refuge with the ideals because he hates himself and is ashamed of himself, thinks that all this is so much the better. The realist, who has come to have a deep respect for himself and faith in the validity of his own will, thinks it so much the worse. To the one, human nature, naturally corrupt, is held back from ruinous excesses only by self-denying conformity to the ideals. To the other these ideals are only swaddling clothes which man has outgrown, and which insufferably impede his movements. No wonder the two cannot agree. The idealist says, "Realism means egotism; and egotism means depravity." The realist declares that when a man abnegates the will to live and be free in a world of the living and free, seeking only to conform to ideals for the sake of being, not himself, but "a good man," then he is morally dead and rotten, and must be left unheeded to abide his resurrection, if that by good luck arrive before his bodily death. Unfortunately, this is the sort of speech that nobody but a realist understands. It will be more amusing as well as more convincing to take an actual example of an idealist criticising a realist. —*The Quintessence of Ibsenism.*

II

THE NEW SPIRIT IN LITERATURE

To Ibsen, from beginning to end, every human being is a sacrifice, whilst to Dickens he is a farce. And there you have the whole difference. No character drawn by Dickens is more ridiculous than Hjalmar Ekdal in The Wild Duck, or more eccentric than old Ekdal, whose toy game-preserve in the garret is more fantastic than the house of Miss Havisham; and yet these Ekdals wring the heart whilst Micawber and Chivery (who sits between the lines of clothes hung out to dry because "it reminds him of groves" as Hjalmar's garret reminds old Ekdal of bear forests) only shake the sides.

It may be that if Dickens could read these lines he would say that the defect was not in him but in his readers; and that if we will return to his books now that Ibsen has opened our eyes we will have to admit that he also saw more in the soul of Micawber than mere laughing gas. And indeed one cannot forget the touches of kindliness and gallantry which ennoble his mirth. Still, between the man who occasionally remembered and the man who never forgot, between Dick Swiveller and Ulrik Brendel, there is a mighty difference. The most that can be said to minimize it is that some of the difference is certainly due to the difference in the attitude of the reader. When an author's works produce violent controversy, and are new, people are apt to read them with that sort of seriousness which is very appropriately called deadly: that is, with a sort of solemn paralysis of every sense except a quiet abstract and baseless momentousness which has no more to do with the contents of the author's works than the horrors of a man in delirium tremens have to do with real rats and snakes. The Bible is a sealed literature to most of us because we cannot read it naturally and unsophisticatedly: we are like the old lady who was edified by the word Mesopotamia, or Samuel Butler's Chowbok, who was converted to Christianity by the effect on his imagination of the prayer for Queen Adelaide. Many years elapsed before those who were impressed with

Beethoven's music ventured to enjoy it sufficiently to discover what a large part of it is a riot of whimsical fun. As to Ibsen, I remember a performance of The Wild Duck, at which the late Clement Scott pointed out triumphantly that the play was so absurd that even the champions of Ibsen could not help laughing at it. It had not occurred to him that Ibsen could laugh like other men. Not until an author has become so familiar that we are quite at our ease with him, and are up to his tricks of manner, do we cease to imagine that he is, relatively to older writers, terribly serious.

Still, the utmost allowance we can make for this difference does not persuade us that Dickens took the improvidence and futility of Micawber as Ibsen took the improvidence and futility of Hjalmar Ekdal. The difference is plain in the works of Dickens himself; for the Dickens of the second half of the nineteenth century (the Ibsen half) is a different man from the Dickens of the first half. From Hard Times and Little Dorrit to Our Mutual Friend every one of Dickens' books lays a heavy burden on our conscience without flattering us with any hopes of a happy ending. But from The Pickwick Papers to Bleak House you can read and laugh and cry and go happy to bed after forgetting yourself in a jolly book. I have pointed out elsewhere how Charles Lever, after producing a series of books in which the old manner of rollicking through life as if all its follies and failures were splendid jokes, and all its conventional enjoyments and attachments delightful and sincere, suddenly supplied the highly appreciative Dickens (as editor of All the Year Round) with a quite new sort of novel, called A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance, which affected both Dickens and the public very unpleasantly by the bitter but tonic flavor we now know as Ibsenism; for the hero began as that uproarious old joke, the boaster who, being a coward, is led into all sorts of dangerous situations, like Bob Acres and Mr. Winkle, and then unexpectedly made them laugh very much on the wrong side of their mouths, exactly as if he were a hero by Ibsen, Strindberg, Turgenieff, Tolstoy, Gorki, Tchekov, or Brieux. And here there was

no question of the author being taken too gloomily. His readers, full of Charles O'Malley and Mickey Free, were approaching the work with the most unsuspicious confidence in its entire jollity. The shock to the security of their senseless laughter caught them utterly unprepared; and they resented it accordingly.

Now that a reaction against realism has set in, and the old jolly ways are coming into fashion again, it is perhaps not so easy as it once was to conceive the extraordinary fascination of this mirthless comedy, this tragedy that stripped the soul naked instead of bedizening it in heroic trappings. But if you have not experienced this fascination yourself, and cannot conceive it, you may take my word for it that it exists, and operates with such power that it puts Shakespeare himself out of countenance. And even for those who are in full reaction against it, it can hardly be possible to go back from the death of Hedwig Ekdal to the death of Little Nell otherwise than as a grown man goes down on all fours and pretends to be a bear for the amusement of his children. Nor need we regret this: there are noble compensations for our increase of wisdom and sorrow. After Hedwig you may not be able to cry over Little Nell, but at least you can read Little Dorrit without calling it twaddle, as some of its first critics did. The jests do not become poorer as they mature into earnest. It was not through joyless poverty of soul that Shelley never laughed, but through an enormous apprehension and realization of the gravity of things that seemed mere fun to other men. If there is no Swiveller and no Trabbs' boy in The Pilgrim's Progress, and if Mr. Badman is drawn as Ibsen would have drawn him and not as Sheridan would have seen him, it does not follow that there is less strength (and joy is a quality of strength) in Bunyan than in Sheridan and Dickens. After all, the salvation of the world depends on the men who will not take evil good-humoredly, and whose laughter destroys the fool instead of encouraging him. "Rightly to be great," said Shakespeare when he had come to the end of mere buffoonery, "is greatly to find quarrel in a straw." The English cry of "Amuse us: take things

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easily: dress up the world prettily for us" seems mere cowardice to the strong souls that dare look facts in the face; and just so far as people cast off levity and idolatry they find themselves able to bear the company of Bunyan and Shelley, of Ibsen and Strindberg and the great Russian realists, and unable to tolerate the sort of laughter that African tribes cannot restrain when a man is flogged or an animal trapped and wounded. They are gaining strength and wisdom: gaining, in short, that sort of life which we call the life everlasting, a sense of which is worth, for pure well-being alone, all the brutish jollities of Tom Cringle and Humphrey Clinker, and even of Falstaff, Pecksniff, and Micawber.

—*The Quintessence of Ibsenism.*

ARTHUR SYMONS

I

ON PROSE AND VERSE

Coleridge defined prose as "words in good order," poetry as "the best words in the best order." But there is no reason why prose should not be the best words in the best order. Rhythm alone, and rhythm of a regular and recurrent kind only, distinguishes poetry from prose. It was contended by an Oxford professor of poetry, M. W. J. Courthope, that the lines of Marlowe,—

> "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
> And burned the topless towers of Ilium?"

are of a different substance from the substance of prose, and that it is certain that Marlowe "could only have ventured on the sublime audacity that a face launched ships and burned towers by escaping from the limits of ordinary language, and conveying his metaphor through the harmonious and ecstatic movement of rhythm and metre." To this it may be answered that any writer of elevated prose, Milton or Ruskin, could have said in prose precisely what Marlowe said in verse, and could have made fine prose of it: the imagination, the idea, a fine kind of form, would have been there; only one thing would have been lacking, the very finest kind of form, the form of verse. It would have been poetical substance, not poetry; the rhythm transforms it into poetry, and nothing but the rhythm.

When Wordsworth declares, in the Preface to the "Lyrical Ballads," that "there neither is nor can be any essential

difference between the language of prose and metrical composition," he is perfectly right, and Coleridge is certainly wrong in saying, "I write in metre because I am about to use a language different from that of prose." Both forget that what must be assumed is poetical substance, and that, given poetical substance, the actual language of the prose and of the verse may very well be identical. When Coleridge says that he would have preferred "Alice Fell" in prose, he is, very justly, criticising the substance of that "metrical composition," which is wholly unpoetical: there, and not in the language, is the distinction between its essential prose and poetry.

There is in prose, whenever it is good prose, but not necessarily inherent in it, a certain rhythm, much laxer than that of verse, not, indeed, bound by formal laws at all; but, in its essence, like the intonation which distinguishes one voice from another in the repetition of a single phrase. Prose, in its rudimentary stage, is merely recorded speech; but, as one may talk in prose all one's life without knowing it, so it may be that the conscious form of verse (speech, that is, reduced to rules, and regarded as partly of the nature of music) was of earlier origin. A certain stage of civilisation must have been reached before it could have occurred to any one that ordinary speech was worth being preserved. Verse is more easily remembered than prose, because of its recurrent beat, and whatever men thought worth remembering, either for its beauty (as a song or hymn) or for its utlity (as a law), would naturally be put into verse. Verse may well have anticipated the existence of writing, but hardly prose. The writing-down of verse, to this day, is almost a materialization of it; but prose exists only as a written document.

The rhythm of verse, that rhythm which distinguishes it from prose, has never been traced with any certainty to its origin. It is not even certain whether its origin is consequent upon the origin of music, or whether the two are independent in their similar but by no means identical capacity. That a sense of regular cadence, though no sense of rhyme, is inherent in our nature, such as it now is,

may be seen by the invariably regular rhythm of children's songs and of the half-inarticulate verse arrangements by which they accompany their games, and by the almost invariable inaccuracy of their rhymes. It is equally evident that the pleasure which we derive from the regular beat of verse is inherent in use, from the susceptibility of children to every form of regular rhythm, from the rocking of the cradle to the sound of a lullaby. Prose cuts itself sharply off from this great inheritance of susceptibility to regular rhythm, and thus, by what is looked upon as natural or instinctive in it, begins its existence a lawless and accidental thing.

In its origin, prose is in no sense an art, and it never has and never will become an art, strictly speaking, as verse is, or painting, or music. Gradually it has found out its capacities; it has discovered how what is useful in it can be trained to beauty; it has learned to set limits to what is unbounded in it, and to follow, at a distance, some of the laws of verse. Gradually it has developed laws of its own, which, however, by the nature of its existence, are less definite, less peculiar to it as a form, than those of verse. Everything that touches literature as literature affects prose, which has come to be the larger half of what we call literature.

It is the danger and privilege of prose that it has no limits. The very form of verse is a concentration; you can load every rift with more ore. Prose, with its careless lineage direct from speech, has a certain impromptu and casualness about it; it has allowed itself so much licence among trivialities that a too serious demeanour surprises; we are apt to be repelled by a too strait observance of law on the part of one not really a citizen. And there is one thing that prose cannot do; it cannot sing. A distinction there is between prose and lyrical verse, even in actual language, because here words are used by rhythm as notes in music, and at times with hardly more than that musical meaning. As Joubert has said, in a figure which is a precise definition: "In the style of poetry every word reverberates like the sound of a well-tuned lyre, and leaves after it num-

berless undulations." The words may be the same, no rarer; the construction may be the same, or, by preference, simpler; but, as the rhythm comes into it, there will come also something which, though it may be born of music, is not music. Call it atmosphere, call it magic; say, again with Joubert: "Fine verses are those that exhale like sounds or perfumes"; we shall never explain, though we may do something to distinguish, that transformation by which prose is changed miraculously into poetry.

Again, it is Joubert who has said once and for all the significant thing: "Nothing is poetry which does not transport: the lyre is in a certain sense a winged instrument." Prose indeed may transport us, though not of the necessity with which poetry is bound to do so. But, in all the transport of prose, something holds us to the ground; for prose, though it may range more widely, has no wings. That is why substance is of so much greater importance in prose than in verse, and why a prose-writer, Balzac or Scott, can be a great writer, a great novelist, and yet not a great writer of prose; here, as elsewhere, prose makes conquest of new tracts of the earth, with leave to fix firm foundations there, by its very lack of skill in flight. The prose play, the novel, come into being as exceptions, are invented by men who cannot write plays in verse, who cannot write epics; and, the usurper once firmly settled, a new dynasty begins, which we come to call legitimate, as is the world's way with all dynasties.

Prose is the language of what we call real life, and it is only in prose that an illusion of external reality can be given. Compare, not only the surroundings, the sense of time, locality, but the whole process and existence of character, in a play of Shakespeare and in a novel of Balzac. I choose Balzac among novelists, because his mind is nearer to what is creative in the poet's mind than that of any novelist, and his method nearer to the method of the poet. Take King Lear and take Père Goriot. Goriot is a Lear at heart, and he suffers the same tortures and humiliations. But precisely where Lear grows up before the mind's eye into a vast cloud and shadowy monument of trouble, Goriot

grows downward into the earth and takes root there, wrapping the dust about all his fibres. It is part of his novelty that he comes so close to us and is so recognisable. Lear may exchange his crown for the fool's bauble, knowing nothing of it; but Goriot knows well enough the value of every banknote that his daughters rob him of. In that definiteness, that new power of "stationing" emotion in a firm and material way, lies one of the great opportunities of prose.

The novel and the prose play are the two great imaginative forms which prose has invented for itself. The essay corresponds in a sense to meditative poetry: has the lyric any analogue in prose? None, I think, in structural form, though there may be outbursts, in such elaborate prose as De Quincey's, which are perhaps only too lyrical, and seem to recognise a more fixed and releasing rhythm, that of verse. The prose of science, philosophy, and even history, has few fundamental duties to literature, or to prose as a fine art. Science, when it is not pure speculation, is concerned with mere facts, or theories of facts; and where a fact in itself is more important than the expression or illumination of that fact, there can be no literature. Philosophers have often been dreamers, poets turned inside out; and such may well bring concrete beauty into the domain of abstract thought. But for the most part philosophers have regarded prose much as ascetics have regarded the body; as a necessary part of matter, a necessary evil. To the historian prose becomes much more important, yet remains less important than it is to the novelist. The historian, after all, like the man of science, is concerned primarily with facts. He undertakes to tell us the truth about the past, and it is only when he competes with the novelist, and attempts psychology, that he is free to become a writer of actual literature. Much fine literature has been written under the name of criticism. But for the critic to aim at making literature is to take off something from the value of his criticism as criticism. It may produce a work of higher value. But it will cease to be, properly speaking, what we distinguish as criticism.

Only in the novel and in the prose play does prose become free to create, free to develop to the utmost limits of its vitality. Together with fiction I would include autobiography, perhaps of all forms of fiction the most convincing. In all these we see prose at work directly on life. "The sense of cadence in prose," says Rémy de Gourmont, "has nothing in common with the sense of music; it is a sense wholly physiological. We set our sensations obscurely to rhythm, like prolonged cries of joy or sorrow. And thus everything can give finer shades, and adapt itself better to thought, in prose than in verse." It is thus in prose that men confess themselves, with minute fidelity; Rousseau's "Confessions" could have been written only in prose. All the best fiction, narrative or dramatic, is a form of confession, personal or vicarious; and, in a sense, it is all personal; for no novelist or dramatist ever rendered vitally a single sensation which he had not observed in himself or which he had not tested by himself. In verse even Villon cannot *"rhythme ses sensations"* so minutely as Rousseau can in prose. The form forces him to give only the essence of his sensations, and to give them in a manner modified by that form. In prose we can almost think in words. Perhaps the highest merit of prose consists in this, that it allows us to think in words.

There is no form of art which is not an attempt to capture life, to create life over again. But art, in verse, being strictly and supremely an art, begins by transforming. Prose fiction transforms, it is true, it cannot help transforming; but by its nature it is able to follow line for line in a way that verse can never do. "The artifices of rhythm," said Poe, "are an insuperable bar to the development of all points of thought or expression which have their basis in truth. . . . One writer of the prose tale, in short, may bring to his theme a vast variety of modes or inflexion of thought and expression—(the ratiocinative, for example, the sarcastic or humorous) which are not only antagonistical to the nature of the poem, but absolutely forbidden by one of its most peculiar and indispensable adjuncts: we allude, of course, to rhythm." It is, in fact, that physiological quality

which gives its chief power, its rarest subtlety, to prose. Prose listens at the doors of all the senses, and repeats their speech almost in their own tones. But poetry (it is again Baudelaire who says it) "is akin to music through a prosody whose roots plunge deeper in the human soul than any classical theory has indicated." Poetry begins where prose ends, and it is at its chief peril that it begins sooner. The one safeguard for the poet is to say to himself: What I can write in prose I will not allow myself to write in verse, out of mere honour towards my material. The further I can extend my prose, the further back do I set the limits of verse. The region of poetry will thus be always the beyond, the ultimate, and with the least possible chance of any confusion of territory.

—*The Romantic Movement in English Poetry.*

II

THE INDEPENDENCE OF POETRY

Critics or historians of poetry are generally concerned with everything but what is essential in it. They deal with poetry as if it were a fashion, finding merit in its historical significance, as we find interest in an early Victorian bonnet, not because it is beautiful, but because people once thought it "genteel." But poetry is a reality, an essence, and is unchanged by any change in fashion; and it is the critic's business to find it where it is, to proclaim it for what it is, and to realise that no amount of historical significance or adaptability to a former fashion can make what is bad poetry in the present century good poetry in any century of the past.

There is a theory, at present much in vogue, by which the evolution of poetry is to be studied everywhere but in the individual poet. This theory has been summed up by M. Rémy de Gourmont in an essay on one of its chief practitioners, Ferdinand Brunetière: "Literary history," he says, "is no longer to be a succession of portraits, of individual lives; the question is now of poetry or of history, not of poets or of historians; works are to be studied, with-

out too much importance being given to their writers, and we are to be shown how these works give birth to one another by natural necessity; how from the species poetry are born the varieties sonnet and madrigal; how, under the influence of surroundings, the lyrical variety is transformed, without losing its essential characteristics, into eloquence, with many further metamorphoses." The same point of view is expressed by Mr. Courthope when he tells us that "it is unphilosophical to believe that a single poet can turn the art of poetry into any channel he will by his own genius: the greatest artists are those who best understood the conflict of tendencies in their own age, and who, though they rise above it into the region of universal truth, are moved by it to reflect in their work its particular form and character." In other words, we are to believe that the cart drives the horse, that the taste of the time makes the genius of the poet. It is the poet who, by his genius, makes the taste of the time. All that "conflicts of tendencies" and the like have to do with the poet is to help him now and again to a convenient form, to suggest to him the lute or the stage, to give him this or that malleable lump of material. He is supremely fortunate if, like Shakespeare, born with a genius for drama, he finds a stage already alive and awaiting him; comparatively unfortunate if, like Goethe, his dramatic genius, lacking a stage for its complete expression, can but create individual works, which, however great, lose their chance of wholly organic development. No great poet ever owed any essential part of his genius to his age; at the most he may have owed to his age the opportunity of an easy achievement.

Take, for instance, Chatterton. Chatterton's "masculine persuasive force" is one of the most genuine things in our literature, and is in no degree affected by the mask which it pleased him to put on. Chatterton required no "needs of the public taste" to guide him into a "channel of great poetical expression." He found for himself that "channel of great poetical expression"; he found accounts in black-letter and turned them into living poetry, and it has been made a crime to him that he was an alchemist of the mind,

and transmuted base metal into gold. It was his whim to invent a language for the expression of the better part of himself, a language which came as close as he could get it to come to that speech of the Middle Ages which he had divined in Gothic architecture and in the crabbed characters of old parchments. In Chatterton the whole modern romantic movement began consciously and as a form of achieved art; and it is not necessary to remember that he died at an age when no other English poet had done work in any degree comparable with his, at least for those qualities of imagination typical of him, in order to give him his due place in English poetry. The existence of Chatterton, at the moment when he happened to exist, proves as conclusively as need be that the man of genius is not of his age, but above it.

The poet who typifies for us the eighteenth century, in which Chatterton was an exception, is Pope; and Pope was not a poet in the true sense, a born poet who had the misfortune to be modified by the influence of the age into which he was born, but a writer of extraordinary prose capacity and finish, who, if he had lived in another age and among genuine poets, would have had no more than a place apart, admired for the unique thing which he could do, but not mistaken for a poet of true lineage. Pope's poetic sensibility may be gauged by a single emendation which he made in the text of his edition of Shakespeare. Shakespeare had made Antony say to Cleopatra, "O grave charm!" To Pope it seemed ridiculous that a light woman should possess gravity in charm. He proposed "gay," and nature seemed to be reasserted: "O gay charm!" what more probable and sufficient?

The poetry of the eighteenth century has no fundamental relation with the rest of English poetry. The poets of every other age can be brought together under a single conception: they harmonise, for all their differences; but between the poets of every other age and the poets of the eighteenth century there is a gap, impossible to pass over. Here and there, as in the best work of Collins, we can distinguish some of the eternal signs of poetry. But, for the

most part, the gap is so palpable that we find critics tacitly acknowledging it by their very efforts to bridge it over, and asking us, with Mr. Courthope, in speaking of Pope, to admit "that it is on a false principle of criticism that Warton, and those who think with him, blame his poetry on account of the absence of qualities which they find in other poets." If those qualities, which are to be found in other poets and not in Pope, are precisely the fundamental qualities which constitute poetry, why should these qualities be quietly laid aside for the occasion, and, the eighteenth century once over, taken up again as if nothing had happened?

The principles of poetry are eternal, and such divine accidents as Christopher Smart and Thomas Chatterton in an age in which the "national taste" was turned persistently from those principles, are enough to show that no pressure of contemporary fashion can wholly hinder a poet from speaking out in his own and the only way. In the Preface to his "Specimens of Later English Poets" Southey had the frankness to admit that "the taste of the public may better be estimated from indifferent poets than from good ones; because the former write for their contemporaries, the latter for posterity," And he asks, naïvely enough: "Why is Pomfret the most popular of the English poets? The fact is certain, and the solution would be useful." Who is aware to-day of the existence of a poem called "The Choice" or of a poet called Pomfret? Pomfret held his own for a hundred years, and now is extinct. Enquiry as to why he was the most popular of the English poets is, however amusing for the social historian, beside the question for the student of poetry. What matters to him is not that "The Choice" was once considered by the public to be an incomparable poem, but that it was and remains a tame and mediocre piece of verse, never really rising to poetry, and that precisely similar material could be and had been lifted into poetry by the genius of a genuine poet, such as Herrick.

Again, the influence of one poet on another has its interest, its importance even; but all that seriously matters is that part which was not influenced, the poet himself. The

personal contact of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the Elizabethan reading of Keats, had their influence on the form and sometimes on the very impulse to existence of the poetry of each poet. But it was of the nature of a lucky or unlucky accident; it was at the most the equivalent of some natural excitement, a sunset or the face of a woman. Nor did the French Revolution create the poetry which gave it expression or moralised over it. King George the Third inspired the genius of Byron, but only better than the "dark blue ocean," because comic material was more valuable to Byron than heroic or sublime material. But that Shelley conceived himself to be atheist, philanthropist, or democrat; that Keats fell in love with Fanny Brawne and not with another woman; that Coleridge took opium and Wordsworth lived in the open air in Cumberland: these things go to the making of the man who is the poet; they touch or inspire him, in what is deepest or most sensitive in his nature; and though they will never explain to us how he came to have the power of creation, they will explain to us something more than his method.

To distinguish poetry, then, where it exists, to consider it in its essence, apart from the accidents of the age in which it came into being, to define its qualities in itself; that is the business of the true critic or student. And in order to do this he must cast aside all theories of evolution or the natural growth of genius, and remember that genius is always an exception, always something which would be a disease if it were not a divine gift. He must clear his mind of all limiting formulas, whether of *milieu*, *Weltschmerz*, or mode. He must disregard all schools or movements as other than convenient and interchangeable labels. He must seek, in short, only poetry, and he must seek poetry in the poet, and nowhere else.

—*The Romantic Movement in English Poetry.*

JOHN GALSWORTHY

I

SOME PLATITUDES CONCERNING DRAMA

A DRAMA must be shaped so as to have a spire of meaning. Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral; and the business of the dramatist is so to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day. Such is the moral that exhales from plays like *Lear, Hamlet,* and *Macbeth.* But such is not the moral to be found in the great bulk of contemporary drama. The moral of the average play is now, and probably has always been, the triumph at all costs of a supposed immediate ethical good over a supposed immediate ethical evil.

The vice of drawing these distorted morals has permeated the drama to its spine; discoloured its art, humanity, and significance; infected its creators, actors, audience, critics; too often turned it from a picture into a caricature. A drama which lives under the shadow of the distorted moral forgets how to be free, fair, and fine—forgets so completely that it often prides itself on having forgotten.

Now, in writing plays, there are, in this matter of the moral, three courses open to the serious dramatist. The first is: To definitely set before the public that which it wishes to have set before it, the views and codes of life by which the public lives and in which it believes. This way is the most common, successful and popular. It makes the dramatist's position sure, and not too obviously authoritative.

The second course is: To definitely set before the public those views and codes of life by which the dramatist him-

self lives, those theories in which he himself believes, the more effectively if they are the opposite of what the public wishes to have placed before it, presenting them so that the audience may swallow them like powder in a spoonful of jam.

There is a third course: To set before the public no cut-and-dried codes, but the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, *but not distorted,* by the dramatist's outlook, set down without fear, favour, or prejudice, leaving the public to draw such poor moral as nature may afford. This third method requires a certain detachment; it requires a sympathy with, a love of, and a curiosity as to, things for their own sake; it requires a far view, together with patient industry, for no immediately practical result.

It was once said of Shakespeare that he had never done any good to any one, and never would. This, unfortunately, could not, in the sense in which the word "good" was then meant, be said of most modern dramatists. In truth, the good that Shakespeare did to humanity was of a remote, and, shall we say, eternal nature; something of the good that men get from having the sky and the sea to look at. And this partly because he was, in his greater plays at all events, free from the habit of drawing a distorted moral. Now, the playwright who supplies to the public the facts of life distorted by the moral which it expects, does so that he may do the public what he considers an immediate good, by fortifying its prejudices; and the dramatist who supplies to the public facts distorted by his own advanced morality, does so because he considers that he will at once benefit the public by substituting for its worn-out ethics his own. In both cases the advantage the dramatist hopes to confer on the public is immediate and practical.

But matters change, and morals change; men remain—and to set men, and the facts about them, down faithfully, so that they draw for us the moral of their natural actions, may also possibly be of benefit to the community. It is, at all events, harder than to set men and facts down, as they ought, or ought not to be. This, however, is not to say that a dramatist should, or indeed can, keep himself and his

temperamental philosophy out of his work. As a man lives and thinks, so will he write. But it is certain, that to the making of good drama, as to the practice of every other art, there must be brought an almost passionate love of discipline, a white-heat of self-respect, a desire to make the truest, fairest, best thing in one's power; and that to these must be added an eye that does not flinch. Such qualities alone will bring to a drama the selfless character which soaks it with inevitability.

The word "pessimist" is frequently applied to the few dramatists who have been content to work in this way. It has been applied, among others, to Euripides, to Shakespeare, to Ibsen; it will be applied to many in the future. Nothing, however, is more dubious than the way in which these two words "pessimist" and "optimist" are used; for the optimist appears to be he who cannot bear the world as it is, and is forced by his nature to picture it as it ought to be, and the pessimist one who cannot only bear the world as it is, but loves it well enough to draw it faithfully. The true lover of the human race is surely he who can put up with it in all its forms, in vice as well as in virtue, in defeat no less than in victory; the true seer he who sees not only joy but sorrow, the true painter of human life one who blinks nothing. It may be that he is also, incidentally, its true benefactor.

In the whole range of the social fabric there are only two impartial persons, the scientist and the artist, and under the latter heading such dramatists as desire to write not only for to-day, but for to-morrow, must strive to come.

But dramatists being as they are made—past remedy—it is perhaps more profitable to examine the various points at which their qualities and defects are shown.

The plot! A good plot is that sure edifice which slowly rises out of interplay of circumstance on temperament, and temperament on circumstance, within the enclosing atmosphere of an idea. A human being is the best plot there is; it may be impossible to see why he is a good plot, because the idea within which he was brought forth cannot be fully grasped; but it is plain that *he is a good plot*. He is

organic. And so it must be with a good play. Reason alone produces no good plots; they come by original sin, sure conception, and instinctive after-power of selecting what benefits the germ. A bad plot, on the other hand, is simply a row of stakes, with a character impaled on each—characters who would have liked to live, but came to untimely grief; who started bravely, but fell on these stakes, placed beforehand in a row, and were transfixed one by one, while their ghosts stride on, squeaking and gibbering, through the play. Whether these stakes are made of facts or of ideas, according to the nature of the dramatist who planted them, their effect on the unfortunate characters is the same; the creatures were begotten to be staked, and staked they are! The demand for a good plot, not unfrequently heard, commonly signifies: "Tickle my sensations by stuffing the play with arbitrary adventures, so that I need not be troubled to take the characters seriously. Set the persons of the play to action, regardless of time, sequence, atmosphere, and probability!"

Now, true dramatic action is what characters do, at once contrary, as it were, to expectation, and yet because they have already done other things. No dramatist should let his audience know what is coming; but neither should he suffer his characters to act without making his audience feel that those actions are in harmony with temperament, and arise from previous known actions, together with the temperaments and previous known actions of the other characters in the play. The dramatist who hangs his characters to his plot, instead of hanging his plot to his characters, is guilty of cardinal sin.

The dialogue! Good dialogue again is character, marshalled so as continually to stimulate interest or excitement. The reason good dialogue is seldom found in plays is merely that it is hard to write, for it requires not only a knowledge of what interests or excites, but such a feeling for character as brings misery to the dramatist's heart when his creations speak as they should not speak—ashes to his mouth when they say things for the sake of saying them—disgust when they are "smart."

The art of writing true dramatic dialogue is an austere art, denying itself all license, grudging every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, suppressing all jokes and epigrams severed from character, relying for fun and pathos on the fun and tears of life. From start to finish good dialogue is hand-made, like good lace; clear, of fine texture, furthering with each thread the harmony and strength of a design to which all must be subordinated.

But good dialogue is also spiritual action. In so far as the dramatist divorces his dialogue from spiritual action—that is to say, from progress of events, or toward events which are significant of character—he is stultifying τὸ δράμα the thing done; he may make pleasing disquisitions, he is not making drama. And in so far as he twists character to suit his moral or his plot, he is neglecting a first principle, that truth to Nature which alone invests art with hand-made quality.

The dramatist's license, in fact, ends with his design. In conception alone he is free. He may take what character or group of characters he chooses, see them with what eyes, knit them with what idea, within the limits of his temperament; but once taken, seen, and knitted, he is bound to treat them like a gentleman, with the tenderest consideration of their mainsprings. Take care of character; action and dialogue will take care of themselves! The true dramatist gives full rein to his temperament in the scope and nature of his subject; having once selected subject and characters, he is just, gentle, restrained, neither gratifying his lust for praise at the expense of his offspring, nor using them as puppets to flout his audience. Being himself the nature that brought them forth, he guides them in the course predestined at their conception. So only have they a chance of defying Time, which is always lying in wait to destroy the false, topical, or fashionable, all—in a word—that is not based on the permanent elements of human nature. The perfect dramatist rounds up his characters and facts within the ring-fence of a dominant idea which fulfils the craving of his spirit; having got them there, he suffers them to live their own lives.

Plot, action, character, dialogue! But there is yet another subject for a platitude. Flavour! An impalpable quality, less easily captured than the scent of a flower, the peculiar and most essential attribute of any work of art! It is the thin, poignant spirit which hovers up out of a play, and is as much its differentiating essence as is caffeine of coffee. Flavour, in fine, is the spirit of the dramatist projected into his work in a state of volatility, so that no one can exactly lay hands on it, here, there, or anywhere. This distinctive essence of a play, marking its brand, is the one thing at which the dramatist cannot work, for it is outside his consciousness. A man may have many moods, he has but one spirit; and this spirit he communicates in some subtle, unconscious way to all his work. It waxes and wanes with the currents of his vitality, but no more alters than a chestnut changes into an oak.

For, in truth, dramas are very like unto trees, springing from seedlings, shaping themselves inevitably in accordance with the laws fast hidden within themselves, drinking sustenance from the earth and air, and in conflict with the natural forces round them. So they slowly come to full growth, until warped, stunted, or risen to fair and gracious height, they stand open to all the winds. And the trees that spring from each dramatist are of different race; he is the spirit of his own sacred grove, into which no stray tree can by any chance enter.

One more platitude. It is not unfashionable to pit one form of drama against another—holding up the naturalistic to the disadvantage of the epic; the epic to the belittlement of the fantastic; the fantastic to the detriment of the naturalistic. Little purpose is thus served. The essential meaning, truth, beauty, and irony of things may be revealed under all these forms. Vision over life and human nature can be as keen and just, the revelation as true, inspiring, delight-giving, and thought-provoking, whatever fashion be employed—it is simply a question of doing it well enough to uncover the kernel of the nut. Whether the violet come from Russia, from Parma, or from England, matters little. Close by the Greek temples at Pæstum there

are violets that seem redder, and sweeter, than any ever seen—as though they have sprung up out of the footprints of some old pagan goddess; but under the April sun, in a Devonshire lane, the little blue scentless violets capture every bit as much of the spring. And so it is with drama—no matter what its form—it need only be the "real thing," need only have caught some of the precious fluids, revelation, or delight, and imprisoned them within a chalice to which we may put our lips and continually drink. . . .

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II

ART

Art is that imaginative expression of human energy, which, through technical concretion of feeling and perception, tends to reconcile the individual with the universal, by exciting in him impersonal emotion. And the greatest Art is that which excites the greatest impersonal emotion in an hypothecated perfect human being.

Impersonal emotion! And what—I thought—do I mean by that? Surely I mean: That is *not* Art, which, while I am contemplating it, inspires me with any active or directive impulse; that *is* Art, when, for however brief a moment, it replaces within me interest in myself by interest in itself. For, let me suppose myself in the presence of a carved marble bath. If my thoughts be: "What could I buy that for?" Impulse of acquisition; or: "From what quarry did it come?" Impulse of inquiry; or: "Which would be the right end for my head?" Mixed impulse of inquiry and acquisition—I am at that moment insensible to it as a work of Art. But, if I stand before it vibrating at sight of its colour and forms, if ever so little and for ever so short a time, unhaunted by any definite practical thought or impulse—to that extent and for that moment it has stolen me away out of myself and put itself there in-

stead; has linked me to the universal by making me forget the individual in me. And for that moment, and only while that moment lasts, it is to me a work of Art. The word "impersonal," then, is but used in this my definition to signify momentary forgetfulness of one's own personality and its active wants.

So Art—I thought—is that which, heard, read, or looked on, while producing no directive impulse, warms one with unconscious vibration. Nor can I imagine any means of defining what is the greatest Art, without hypothecating a perfect human being. But since we shall never see, or know if we do see, that desirable creature—dogmatism is banished, "Academy" is dead to the discussion, deader than even Tolstoy left it after his famous treatise "What is Art?" For, having destroyed all the old Judges and Academies, Tolstoy, by saying that the greatest Art was that which appealed to the greatest number of living human beings, raised up the masses of mankind to be a definite new Judge or Academy, as tyrannical and narrow as ever were those whom he had destroyed.

This, at all events—I thought—is as far as I dare go in defining what Art is. But let me try to make plain to myself what is the essential quality that gives to Art the power of exciting this unconscious vibration, this impersonal emotion. It has been called Beauty! An awkward word—a perpetual begging of the question; too current in use, too ambiguous altogether; now too narrow, now too wide—a word, in fact, too glib to know at all what it means. And how dangerous a word—often misleading us into slabbing with extraneous floridities what would otherwise, on its own plane, be Art! To be decorative where decoration is not suitable, to be lyrical where lyricism is out of place, is assuredly to spoil Art, not to achieve it. But this essential quality of Art has also, and more happily, been called Rhythm. And, what is Rhythm if not that mysterious harmony between part and part, and part and whole, which gives what is called life; that exact proportion, the mystery of which is best grasped in observing how life leaves an animate creature when the essential relation of part to

whole has been sufficiently disturbed. And I agree that this rhythmic relation of part to part, and part to whole—in short, vitality—is the one quality inseparable from a work of Art. For nothing which does not seem to a man possessed of this rhythmic vitality, can ever steal him out of himself.

And having got thus far in my thoughts, I paused, watching the swallows; for they seemed to me the symbol, in their swift, sure curvetting, all daring and balance and surprise, of the delicate poise and motion of Art, that visits no two men alike, in a world where no two things of all the things there be, are quite the same.

Yes—I thought—and this Art is the one form of human energy in the whole world, which really works for union, and destroys the barriers between man and man. It is the continual, unconscious replacement, however fleeting, of oneself by another; the real cement of human life; the everlasting refreshment and renewal. For, what is grievous, dompting, grim, about our lives is that we are shut up within ourselves, with an itch to get outside ourselves. And to be stolen away from ourselves by Art is a momentary relaxation from that itching, a minute's profound, and as it were secret, enfranchisement. The active amusements and relaxations of life can only rest certain of our faculties, by indulging others; the whole self is never rested save through that unconsciousness of self, which comes through rapt contemplation of Nature or of Art.

And suddenly I remembered that some believe that Art does not produce unconsciousness of self, but rather very vivid self-realisation.

Ah! but—I thought—that is not the first and instant effect of Art; the new impetus is the after effect of that momentary replacement of oneself by the self of the work before us; it is surely *the result* of that brief span of enlargement, enfranchisement, and rest.

Yes, Art is the great and universal refreshment. For Art is never dogmatic; holds no brief for itself—you may take it or you may leave it. It does not force itself rudely where it is not wanted. It is reverent to all tempers, to all

points of view. But it is wilful—the very wind in the comings and goings of its influence, an uncapturable fugitive, visiting our hearts at vagrant, sweet moments; since we often stand even before the greatest works of Art without being able quite to lose ourselves! That restful oblivion comes, we never quite know when—and it is gone! But when it comes, it is a spirit hovering with cool wings, blessing us from least to greatest, according to our powers; a spirit deathless and varied as human life itself.

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ARNOLD BENNETT

I

A POET AND HIS PEOPLE

. . . I MET ten thousand men on the Putney High Street, and they were all my brothers. But I alone was aware of it. As I stood watching autobus after autobus swing round in a fearful semicircle to begin a new journey, I gazed myself into a mystic comprehension of the significance of what I saw. A few yards beyond where the autobuses turned was a certain house with lighted upper windows, and in that house the greatest lyric versifier that England ever had, and one of the great poets of the whole world and of all the ages, was dying: a name immortal. But nobody looked; nobody seemed to care; I doubt if anyone thought of it. This enormous negligence appeared to me to be fine, to be magnificently human.

The next day all the shops were open, and hundreds of fatigued assistants were pouring out their exhaustless patience on thousands of urgent and bright women; and flags waved on high, and the gutters were banked with yellow and white flowers, and the air was brisk and the roadways were clean. The very vital spirit of energy seemed to have scattered the breath of life generously, so that all were intoxicated by it in the gay sunshine. He was dead then. The waving posters said it. When Tennyson died I felt less hurt; for I had serious charges to bring against Tennyson, which impaired my affection for him. But I was more shocked. When Tennyson died, everybody knew it, and imaginatively realized it. Everybody was touched.

I was saddened then as much by the contagion of a general grief as by a sorrow of my own. But there was no general

grief on Saturday. Swinburne had written for fifty years, and never once moved the nation, save inimically, when "Poems and Ballads" came near to being burnt publicly by the hangman. (By "the nation," I mean newspaper readers. The real nation, busy with the problem of eating, dying, and being born all in one room, has never heard of either Tennyson or Swinburne or George R. Sims.) There are poems of Tennyson, of Wordsworth, even of the speciously recondite Browning, that have entered into the general consciousness. But nothing of Swinburne's! Swinburne had no moral ideas to impart. Swinburne never publicly yearned to meet his Pilot face to face. He never galloped on one of Lord George Sanger's horses from Aix to Ghent. He was interested only in ideal manifestations of beauty and force. Except when he grieved the judicious by the expression of political crudities, he never connected art with any form of morals that the British public could understand. He sang. He sang supremely. And it wasn't enough for the British public. The consequence was that his fame spread out as far as undergraduates, and the tiny mob of undergraduates was the largest mob that ever worried itself about Swinburne. Their shouts showed the high-water mark of his popularity. When one of them wrote in a facetious ecstasy over "Dolores,"

But you came, O you procuratores
And ran us all in!

that moment was the crown of Swinburne's career as a popular author. With its incomparable finger on the public pulse the *Daily Mail*, on the day when it announced Swinburne's death, devoted one of its placards to the performances of a lady and a dog on a wrecked liner, and another to the antics of a lunatic with a revolver. The *Daily Mail* knew what it was about. Do not imagine that I am trying to be sardonic about the English race and its organs. Not at all. The English race is all right, though ageing now. The English race has committed no crime in demanding from its poets something that Swinburne could

not give. I am merely trying to make clear the exceeding strangeness of the apparition of a poet like Swinburne in a place like England.

Last year I was walking down Putney Hill, and I saw Swinburne for the first and last time. I could see nothing but his face and head. I did not notice those ridiculously short trousers that Putney people invariably mention when mentioning Swinburne. Never have I seen a man's life more clearly written in his eyes and mouth and forehead. The face of a man who had lived with fine, austere, passionate thoughts of his own! By the heavens, it was a noble sight. I have not seen a nobler. Now, I knew by hearsay every crease in his trousers, but nobody had told me that his face was a vision that would never fade from my memory. And nobody, I found afterwards by inquiry, had "noticed anything particular" about his face. I don't mind, either for Swinburne or for Putney. I reflect that if Putney ignored Swinburne, he ignored Putney. And I reflect that there is great stuff in Putney for a poet, and marvel that Swinburne never perceived it and used it. He must have been born English, and in the nineteenth century, by accident. He was misprized while living. That is nothing. What does annoy me is that critics who know better are pandering to the national hypocrisy after his death. In a dozen columns he has been sped into the unknown as "a great Victorian!" Miserable dishonesty! Nobody was ever less Victorian than Swinburne. And then when these critics have to skate over the "Poems and Ballads" episode—thin, cracking ice!—how they repeat delicately the word "sensuous," "sensuous." Out with it, tailorish and craven minds, and say "sensual!" For sensual the book is. It is fine in sensuality, and no talking will ever get you away from that. Villiers de L'Isle Adam once wrote an essay on "Le Sadisme Anglais," and supported it with a translation of a large part of "Anactoria." And even Paris was startled. A rare trick for a supreme genius to play on the country of his birth, enshrining in the topmost heights of its literature a lovely poem that cannot be discussed! . . . Well, Swinburne has got the better of us there. He has simply knocked to pieces the theory that

great art is inseparable from the Ten Commandments. His greatest poem was written in honour of a poet whom any English Vigilance Society would have crucified. "Sane" critics will naturally observe, in their quiet manner, that "Anactoria" and similar feats were "so unnecessary." Would it were true!

—*Books and Persons.*

II

ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM

I LEARN that Mr. Elkin Mathews is about to publish a collected uniform edition of the works (poems and criticism) and correspondence of the late Lionel Johnson. I presume that this edition will comprise his study of Thomas Hardy. The enterprise proves that Lionel Johnson has admirers capable of an excellent piety; and it also argues a certain continuance of the demand for his books. I was never deeply impressed by Lionel Johnson's criticisms, and still less by his verse, but in the days of his activity I was young and difficult and hasty. Perhaps my net was too coarse for his fineness. But, anyhow, I would give much to have a large homogeneous body of English literary criticism to read *at*. And I should be obliged to anyone who would point out to me where such a body of first-rate criticism is to be found. I have never been able to find it for myself. When I think of Pierre Bayle, Ste. Beuve and Taine, and of the keen pleasure I derive from the immense pasture offered by their voluminous and consistently admirable works, I ask in vain where are the great English critics of English literature. Beside these French critics, the best of our own seem either fragmentary or provincial—yes, curiously provincial. Except Hazlitt we have, I believe, no even approximately first-class writer who devoted his main activity to criticism. And Hazlitt, though he is very readable, has neither the urbaneness, nor the science, nor the learning, nor the wide grasp of life and history that characterize the three above-named. Briefly, he didn't know enough.

Lamb would have been a first-class critic if he hadn't given the chief part of his life to clerkship. Lamb at any rate is not provincial. His perceptions are never at fault. Every sentence of Lamb proves his taste and his powerful intelligence. Coleridge—well, Coleridge has his comprehensible moments, but they are few; Matthew Arnold, with study and discipline, might perhaps have been a great critic, only his passion for literature was not strong enough to make him give up school-inspecting—and there you are! Moreover, Matthew Arnold could never have written of women as Ste. Beuve did. There were a lot of vastly interesting things that Matthew Arnold did not understand and did not want to understand. He, too, was provincial (I regret to say)—you can feel it throughout his letters, though his letters make very good quiet reading. Churton Collins was a scholar of an extreme type; unfortunately he possessed no real feeling for literature, and thus his judgment, when it had to stand alone, cut a figure prodigiously absurd. And among living practitioners? Well, I have no hesitation in de-classing the whole professorial squad—Bradley, Herford, Dowden, Walter Raleigh, Elton, Saintsbury. The first business of any writer, and especially of any critical writer, is not to be mandarinic and tedious, and these lecturers have not yet learnt that first business. The best of them is George Saintsbury, but his style is such that even in Carmelite Street the sub-editors would try to correct it. Imagine the reception of such a style in Paris! Still, Professor Saintsbury does occasionally stray out of the university quadrangles, and puts on the semblance of a male human being as distinguished from an asexual pedagogue. Professor Walter Raleigh is improving. Professor Elton has never fallen to the depths of sterile and pretentious banality which are the natural and customary level of the remaining three. . . . You think I am letting my pen run away with me? Not at all. That is nothing to what I could say if I tried. Mr. J. W. Mackail might have been one of our major critics, but there again—he, too, prefers the security of a Government office, like Mr. Austin Dobson, who, by the way, is very good in a very limited sphere. Perhaps

Austin Dobson is as good as we have. Compare his low flight with the terrific sweeping range of a Ste. Beuve or a Taine. I wish that some greatly gifted youth now aged about seventeen would make up his mind to be a literary critic and nothing else.

—*Books and Persons.*

W. L. GEORGE

SINCERITY AND LITERATURE

THE assassins of sincerity are the publisher and the policeman. Dismiss the illusion that banned books are bold and bad; for the most part they are kindly and mild, silly beyond the conception of Miss Elinor Glyn, beyond the sentimental limits of Mrs. Barclay; they are seldom vicious in intent, and too devoid of skill to be vicious in achievement. The real bold books are unwritten or unpublished; for nobody but a fool would expect a publisher to be fool enough to publish them. There are, it is true, three or four London publishers who are not afraid of the libraries, but they are afraid of the police, and any one who wishes to test them can offer them, for instance a translation of "Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre." The publisher is to a certain extent a human being; he knows that works of this type (and this one is masterly) are often works of art; he knows that they are salable, and that assured profits would follow on publication, were the books not suppressed by the police. But he does not publish them, because he also knows that the police and its backers, purity societies and common informers, would demand seizure of the stock after the first review and hurry to the police court all those who had taken part in the printing and issue of the works. As a result many of these books are driven underground into the vile atmosphere of the vilest shops; some are great works of art; one is, in the words of Mr. Anatole France "minded to weep over them with the nine Muses for company." Need I say more than that "Madame Bovary," the greaest novel the world has seen, is now being sold in a shilling paper edition under a cover which shows Madame Bovary in a

sort of private dining room, dressed in a chemise, and preparing to drink off a bumper of champagne. (Possibly the designer of this cover has in his mind sparkling burgundy.)

Several cases are fresh in my memory where purity, living in what Racine called "the fear of God, sir, and of the police," has intervened to stop the circulation of the novel. One is that of "The Yoke," a novel of no particular merit, devoid of subversive teaching, but interesting because it was frank, because it did not portray love on the lines of musical comedy, because it faced the common sex problem of the middle-aged spinster and the very young man, because it did not ignore the peril which everybody knows to be lurking within a mile of Broadway. "The Yoke" enjoyed a large sale at six shillings and was not interfered with, presumably because those who can afford six shillings may be abandoned to the scarlet woman. It was then published at a shilling. Soon after, the secret combination of common informer, purity group, and police forced the publisher into a police court, compelled him to express regret for the publication, and to destroy all the remaining copies and moulds. That is a brief tragedy, and it in no wise involves the library system. Another tragedy may be added. In 1910 Sudermann's novel, "Das Hohe Lied," was published under the title of "The Song of Songs." It is not a very interesting novel; it is long, rather crude, but it relates faithfully enough the career of a woman who lived by the sale of herself. The trouble was that she made rather a success of it, and it was shown in a few scenes that she did not always detest the incidents of this career, which is not unnatural. In December, 1910, two inspectors from the Criminal Investigation Department called on the publisher and informed his manager that a complaint had been made against the book; it was described as obscene. The officers apparently went on to say that their director, Sir Melville Macnaghten, did not associate himself with that opinion, but their object was to draw the publisher's attention to the fact that a complaint had been made. Thereupon, without further combat, the publisher withdrew the book. Nobody can blame him; he was not in business to fight battles of

this kind, and I suppose that few British juries would have supported him. They would, more likely, have given the case against him first and tried to get hold of a private copy of the book after, presumably to read on Sunday afternoons. The interesting part of the business is that the accusation remained anonymous, that the police did not associate itself with it, but came humbly, helmet in hand, to convey the displeasure of some secret somebody with some secret something in the book. And there you are! That is all you need to snuff out the quite good work of a novelist with a quite good European reputation. . . .

Now and then a publisher dares, and dares too far. Such is the case of "The Rainbow" by Mr. D. H. Lawrence, where the usual methods of Puritan terrorism were applied, where the publisher was taken into court, and made to eat humble pie, knowing that if he refused he must drink hemlock. Certainly "The Rainbow" was a bad book, for it was an ill-written book, a book of hatred and desire—but many of us are people of hatred and desire, and I submit that there is no freedom when a minority of one in a nation of fifty millions is hampered in the expression of his feelings. More than one opinion has been held by one man and is now the belief of all the world. The beliefs of tomorrow will be slain if we suppress to-day the opinion of one; I would surrender all the rupees and virgins of Bengal for the sake of the atom of truth which may, in another age, build up immortal understanding in the heart of man. . . .

This secret terrorism is a national calamity, for it procures the sterilisation of the English novel. It was always so, for there is not complete sincerity in "Tom Jones," or in "A Mummer's Wife," even as the word sincerity is understood in England, and there is little nowadays. We have to-day a certain number of fairly courageous novelists whose works are alluded to in other chapters, but they are not completely sincere. If they were they would not be concerned with censorships; they would not be published at all. I do not suggest that they wish to be insincere, but they cannot help it. Their insincerity, I suspect, as exemplified by the avoidance of certain details, arises from the neces-

sity of that avoidance; it arises also from the habit of concealment and evasion which a stupefied public, led by a neurotic faction, has imposed upon them.

Our novelists openly discuss every feature of social life, politics, religion, but they cast over sex a thick veil of ellipse and metaphor. Thus Mr. Onions suggests, but dares not name, the disease a character contracts; Mr. Lawrence leaves in some doubt the actual deed of his "Trespasser," while "H. H. Richardson" leaves to our conjectures the habits of Schilsky. (So do I, you see; if I were to say exactly what I mean it would never do.)

It may be said that all this is not insincerity, and that there is no need to dwell upon what the respectable call the unwholesome, the unhealthy, the unnecessary, but I think we must accept that the bowdlerising to which a novelist subjects his own work results in lopsidedness. If a novelist were to develop his characters evenly, the three-hundred-page novel might extend to five hundred; the additional two hundred pages would be made up entirely of the sex preoccupations of the characters, their adventures and attempts at satisfaction. There would be as many scenes in the bedroom as in the drawing-room, probably more, given that human beings spend more time in the former than in the latter apartment. There would be abundant detail, detail that would bring out an intimacy of contact, a completeness of mutual understanding which does not generally come about when characters meet at breakfast or on the golf course. The additional pages would offer pictures of the sex side of the characters, and thus would compel them to come alive; at present they often fail to come alive because they develop only on say five sides out of six.

No character in a modern English novel has been fully developed. Sometimes, as in the case of Mendel, of Jude the Obscure, of Mark Lennan, of Gyp Fiörsen, one has the impression that they are fully developed because the book mainly describes their sex adventures, but one could write a thousand pages about sex adventures and have done nothing but produce a sentimental atmosphere. A hundred kisses do not make one kiss, and there is more truth in one page

of "Madame Bovary" than in the shackled works of Mr. Hardy. It is not his fault, it is a case of—if England but knew—and, therefore, if Hardy but could. Our literary characters are lopsided because their ordinary traits are fully portrayed, analysed with extraordinary minuteness, while their sex life is cloaked, minimised, or left out. Therefore, as the ordinary man does indulge his sexual proclivities, as a large proportion of his thoughts run on sex if he is a live man, the characters in modern novels are false. They are megacephalous and emasculate. If their religious views, their political opinions, their sporting tastes were whittled down as cruelly as their sexual tendencies, then the characters would become balanced; they would be dwarfs, but they would be true; if all the characteristics of men were as faintly suggested in them as their sexual traits, the persons that figure in novels would simulate reality.

They would not be reality, but they would be less untrue than they are to-day. This, however, is merely theory, for it is impossible to apply to the novel the paradox that insincerity in everything being better than insincerity in one thing, it is desirable to be insincere throughout. The paradox cannot be applied because then a novel of ideas could not be written; shrouded religious doubt, shy socialism, suggested anarchism, would reduce the length by nine-tenths, make of the novel a short story. It would be perfectly balanced and perfectly insincere; æsthetically sound, it would satisfy nobody. We should be compelled to pad it out with murder, theft, and arson, which, as everybody knows, are perfectly moral things to write about.

It is a cruel position for the English novel. The novelist may discuss anything but the main preoccupation of life. If he describes the city clerk he may dilate upon city swindles, but he must select warily from among the city clerk's loves. The novelist knows these loves, records them in his mind, speaks of them freely, but he does not write them down. If he did, his publisher would go to gaol. For this reason there is no completely sincere writing. The novelist is put into the witness box, but he is not sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;

he is sworn to tell the truth, but not the whole truth. He is not perjured, but he is muzzled.

Obviously this is an unhealthy state, for the soul of a people is in its books, and I suspect that it does a people no good if its preoccupations find no outlet; it develops inhibitions, while its Puritan masters develop phobias. The cloaking of the truth makes neither modesty nor mock modesty; it makes impurity. There is no market for pornography, for pornography makes no converts who were not already converted. I believe that the purity propaganda creates much of the evil that lives; I charge advertising reformers with minds full of hate, bishops full of wind, and bourgeois full of fear, with having exercised through the pulpit and the platform a more stimulating effect upon youth, and with having given it more unhealthy information about white slavery, secret cinemas, and disorderly houses than it could ever have gained from all the books that were ever printed in Amsterdam. I once went to a meeting for men only, and came out with two entirely new brands of vice; a bishop held up to me the luridities of secret cinemas, and did everything for me except to give me the address. But he filled my mind with cinemas. One could multiply these instances indefinitely. I do not think that we should cover things up; we had enough of that during the mid-Victorian period, when respectability was at its height, and when women, in bodice and bustle, did their best to make respectability difficult; no; we do not want things covered up, but we do not want them advertised. I believe that as good coin drives out bad, the Puritans would find a greater safety and the world a greater freedom in allowing good literature to vie with bad; the good would inevitably win; no immoral literature is good; all bad literature dies. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England and France produced the vilest pornography we know. Those centuries also produced Molière and Fielding. Well, to-day you can buy Molière and Fielding everywhere but the pornography of those centuries is dead, and you can find it nowhere except in a really good West End club. —*Literary Chapters.*

THOMAS MacDONAGH

IRELAND AND THE NEW PATHS

In literature it will be found that the characteristic contribution of each great master is two-fold. The new message comes in a new form, the new wine in a new vessel. No great poet has really put new wine into old bottles. . . . A new verse, a new style in prose—something that can be weighed and measured—a new manifestation that can be seen, comes always with that new imponderable, incommensurable, elusive something which one knows to be fine literature, but which cannot be tested by any such sure standards. I will say that poetry may be not only a criticism of life, as Matthew Arnold thought, but an interpretation of life, or, at its highest, an illumination of life. The ancient Irish critic of the *Triads* had this for one of his marks of the poet, *imbas forosna*, knowledge that illumines. I will say this. I know well enough what I mean by these terms. But when I come to apply them to some actual piece of literature, more especially of new literature, they help me little. This new thing is unlike all the fine literature that I know. Is it a criticism of life? Is it an interpretation? Is it an illumination? What really is life? When so illuminated does it change and become different from all that we know by experience? What right have we to limit it to experience? Are we looking only for the experience of the intellectual thing, forgetting the intuitive? Are not these terms of criticism only words of praise and no standards at all? And so—though with the old standard of beauty we have set aside the old standard of truth—so back to the tragic query, What is truth?

If, in the course of these studies, I have said that poetry

is a criticism, or an interpretation, or an illumination of life, I use the terms with reference to work that has fallen back into perspective—not work in the near shadow of which we stand. To answer one of my questions just put, I use them as terms of praise, not as tests for the next poem that comes.

On the other hand one can really, if only in a negative way, judge the form of a new work. Forms change and become outworn though the essential stuff of literature may be the same from age to age. A five-act play, written new in just Shakespeare's verse, if such a thing could be done, would be something of a sham antique. Good Tennysonian blank verse betrays many pretentious poems. The imitators of Blake and Browning have not surpassed their masters. Whitman, however, the most confident of us cannot condemn so easily. He may be but another eccentric. He may be the great innovator. The futurists may be charlatans, or fools, or lunatics. They may be prophets. The difference of their manner from the good old ways does not prove their rightness or their greatness; but the hostile critics of their works use words and weapons so like those used against other work that survived attack and afterwards became right and great and good, that one cannot lightly join them. Most writers who made daring departures in form merely wandered off and were lost. Yet the new path of some pioneer to-day may prove the right turning for all. The path of glory in literature has not been, as many appear to think, the broad and easy way. It is now beaten broad enough—up to a certain point, reached a generation ago—by the feet of many who have followed in the tracks of men who discovered things in the heavens and on earth, not keeping their eyes on their feet, and of men who ran hither and thither after splendid adventures, and of men who fared far to the east and to the west lured by the voices of strange peoples. It is not the obvious straight path that leads from height to height.

As with the masters, so with what we have still to call the movements. The Renaissance, in whose mode we are still, or have been till now, had its new wine and its new

vessels. The so-called classic and romantic movements within it have theirs, each stage of each remembered by the double gift of a master. The gift to literature of the writers whom I count as of the Irish Mode—putting this term of mine in the place of that vague and illogical Celtic Note—is likewise double. For the reasons which I here set forth, I criticise as much the form of the work as the import, though to me, of course, that import is its chief worth. I make experimental studies to satisfy myself that this is at least a mode, distinctive and apart.

The Renaissance, with the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, the discoveries of Columbus and his followers; later such things as the discovery of the law of gravitation, the Cartesian philosophy, the French Revolution, Darwin's theory of evolution: these have profoundly affected European literature. They have not similarly affected literature in Ireland. This is not to say of course that in Ireland writers are still likely to write of the earth as the centre of the solar system, of epicycles and the rest. It is to say that literature here has not had just that education which is common to the other literatures of western Europe. Those literatures have been, as I have said, up to these days, parts of the Renaissance. In them the authority of the ancients has held:

"And Boileau still in right of Horace sways."

That word "authority" holds a world of meaning in this matter. Another word of great content is "intellectual." Intellectualism is the Renaissance. When in the place of that clear standard we set those pillars of cloud and of fire known to the spiritual intuitions, the day of the Renaissance is done; the forms of Renaissance literature decay.

In Ireland some literature has kept the old way familiar to the Middle Age.

Let me not anticipate my conclusion. Let me make clear my meaning of things I have said above.

In his sonnet, *On first looking into Chapman's Homer*, Keats has set together the three great influences of Elizabethan literature: the classic world, its art, its literature,

its story, represented by Homer; the new astronomy that raised adventure to the skies; the new discoveries that opened to the view new seas and lands beyonds the peaks of Darien. Keats himself, who might have lived long enough for me a child to know him, owned the same influences. He touched in not too late a day the beautiful mythology of Greece; yet he felt other influences too. *La Belle Dame sans Merci,* though he may have disdained it, shows that another wind blew on him at hours. So too with the other arts in his time. They derived from Italy, and through Italy from Greece. To our eyes even the Romantic era has a classic quality, a sense of repose almost, compared with the disturbance now taking place in all the arts. All the forms are suffering change. It would seem that the mind (its outlook and its inlook, if one may say so) is suffering change and demanding different forms of expression. This, since the establishment of Impressionism, is more easily admitted in painting than in literature, as indeed since Wagner it may be more easily admitted in music too; but to anyone conversant with modern literature the same change of order is evident here. Compare modern poems and modern novels, the claim of which to serious recognition cannot be denied, with similar works of the previous ages and you will at once perceive that the difference here too is due to the introduction of Impressionism and Wagnerism. To us as to the ancient Irish poets, the half-said thing is dearest. The rhythm made by an emotion informs the poem and so recreates the emotion. As to the mystic, so to the lyric poet the unknown transcends the known. The purely rational, purely intellectual way of expression does not lead from it and so to it. I am not writing here of European literature in general, or of English literature in particular. I am introducing a movement that is important to English literature, because it is in part a revolt from it—because it has gone its own way, independent of it, though using for its language English or a dialect of English. I am treating it as a separate thing; and all that I have said so far is said rather by way of comparison, to set it in its true light. It enters literature at a

period which seems to us who are of it as a period of disturbance, of change. Its mode seems strange to the critics and to the prosodists of the old order. Its mode is not that of the Futurists or the writers of *vers libres;* but still, coming with the work of these, it stands as another element of disturbance, of revolution; it is comparatively free from the old authority imposed by the Renaissance, while the other elements in this disturbance are rebelling against that authority; it is the mode of a people to whom the ideal, the spiritual, the mystic, are the true, while theirs is that of people who seek, however blindly, for a truth beyond the easy truth which is the beauty of the romantics, who will not admit that this identification of a rational truth and a rational beauty is all they know on earth or all they need to know. Beyond this I would not urge the parallel; but this it is necessary to note in order to understand the reception given to the Irish Mode. It has come in its due time. Mangan and Callanan in the first half of the nineteenth century tuned the harp that is now ringing in the hands of many. Ears that in the older days would not have listened to the rarest music of that harp are now attentive to every tone. The poets of this mode have till now been ignorant of the parallel movement; they have taken little or no note of the new writers of free verse or of the futurists. Yet their work to the coming age may appear one with the work of these. And indeed there is a near kinship. The freedom being sought now elsewhere has long been enjoyed here. One might reasonably argue that Macpherson, so great an influence in the Romance, was the first of the free verse men—that his work marks the beginning, not merely of the Romantic Era of European literature, but of that freedom of the new time set against the old Authority of the Renaissance.

—*Literature in Ireland.*

JOHN COOPER POWYS

SUSPENDED JUDGMENT

THE conclusion of any critical essay must in large measure be lame and halting; must indeed be a whispered warning to the reader to take what has gone before, however ardently expressed, with that wise pinch of true Attic salt which mitigates even a relative finality in these high things.

One comes to feel more and more, as one reads many books, that judicial decisions are laughable and useless in this rare atmosphere, and that the mere utterance of such platitudinous decrees sets the pronouncer of them outside the inner and exclusive pale.

One comes to feel more and more that all that any of us has a right to do is to set down as patiently and tenderly as he may the particular response, here or there, from this side or the other, as it chances to happen, that is aroused in his own soul by those historic works of art, which, whatever principle of selection it is that places them in our hands, have fallen somehow across our path.

It might seem that a direct, natural and spontaneous response, of the kind I have in my mind, to these famous works, were easy enough of attainment. Nothing, on the contrary, is more difficult to secure or more seldom secured. One might almost hazard the paradox that the real art of criticism only begins when we shake ourselves free of all books and win access to that locked and sealed and uncut volume which is the book of our own feelings.

The art of self-culture—one learns just that when youth's outward-looking curiosity and passion begin to ebb—is the art of freeing oneself from the influence of books so that one may enjoy what one is destined to enjoy without

pedantry or scruple. And yet, by the profound law of the system of things, when one has thus freed oneself from the tyranny of literary catchwords and the dead weight of cultivated public opinion, one comes back to the world of books with an added zest. It is then, and only then, that one reads with real unscrupulousness, thinking solely of the pleasure, and nothing of the rectitude or propriety or adequacy of what we take up.

And it is then that the great figures of the master-writers appear in their true light; the light—that is to say—in which we, and not another have visualised them, felt them, and reacted from them.

It is wonderful what thrilling pleasures there are in store for us in literature when once we have cut ouselves adrift from all this superfluity of cultured opinion, and have given ourselves complete leave to love what we like and hate what we like and be indifferent to what we like, as the world swings round!

I think the secret of making an exquisite use of literature so that it shall colour and penetrate our days is only a small part of what the wisest epicureans among us are concerned with attaining. I think it is one of the most precious benefits conferred on us by every new writer that he flings us back more deeply than ever upon ourselves. We draw out of him his vision, his peculiar atmosphere, his especial quality of mental and emotional tone. We savour this and assimilate it and store it up, as something which we have made our own and which is there to fall back upon when we want it. But beyond our enjoyment of this new increment to our treasury of feeling, we are driven inwards once more in a kind of intellectual rivalry with the very thing we have just acquired, and in precise proportion as it has seemed to us exciting and original we are roused in the depths of our mind to substitute something else for it; and this something else is nothing less than the evocation of our own originality, called up out of the hidden caverns of our being to claim its own creative place in the communion between our soul and the world.

I can only speak for myself; but my own preference

among writers will always be for those whose genius consists rather in creating a certain mental atmosphere than in hammering out isolated works of art, rounded and complete.

For a flawless work of art is a thing for a moment, while that more penetrating projection of an original personality which one calls a mental or æsthetic atmosphere, is a thing that floats and flows and drifts and wavers, far beyond the boundaries of any limited creation. Such an atmosphere, such a vague intellectual music, in the air about us, is the thing that really challenges the responsive spirit in ourselves; challenges it and rouses it to take the part which it has a right to take, the part which it alone *can* take, in recreating the world for us in accordance with our natural fatality.

It is only by the process of gradual disillusionment that we come at last to recognize what we ourselves—undistracted now by any external authority—need and require from the genius of the past. For my own part, looking over the great names, I am at this moment drawn instinctively only to two among them all—to William Blake and to Paul Verlaine; and this is an indication to me that what my own soul requires is not philosophy or psychology or wit or sublimity, but a certain delicate transmutation of the little casual things that cross my way, and a certain faint, low, sweet music, rumouring from indistinguishable horizons, and bringing me vague rare thoughts, cool and quiet and deep and magical, such as have no concern with the clamour and brutality of the crowd. . . .

Art and Literature are, after all, and there is little use denying it, the last refuge and sanctuary, in a world ruled by machinery and sentiment, of the free, wild, reckless, irresponsible, anarchical imagination of such as refuse to sacrifice their own dreams for the dreams—not less illusive—of the general herd.

We have to face the fact—bitter and melancholy though it may be—that in our great bourgeois-dominated democracies the majority of people would like to trample out the flame of genius altogether; trample it out as something inimical to their peace.

Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, were all completely aware of this instinctive hatred with which the mob of men regard what is exceptional and rare. The Hamlet-spirit of the author of Coriolanus must chuckle bitterly in that grave in Stratford-on-Avon when he learns that the new ideal is the ideal of cosmopolitan literature expressing the soul of the average man.

The clash is bound to come sooner or later between public opinion, concerned to preserve the comfort of its illusions, and the art of the individual artist playing, in noble irresponsibility, with all illusions.

It was his consciousness of this—of the natural antagonism of the mob and its leaders to all great literature—that made Goethe draw back so coldly and proudly from the popular tendencies of his time, and seek refuge among the great individualistic spirits of the classic civilisations. And what Goethe—the good European—did in his hour, the more classical among European writers of our own day do still.

The great style—the style which is like gold and bronze in an age of clay and rubble—remains as the only sure refuge we have from the howling vulgarities of our generation. If books were taken from us—the high, calm, beautiful, ironical books of classic tradition—how, in this age, could the more sensitive among us endure to live at all?

With brutality and insanity and ruffianism, with complacency and stupidity and sentimentalism, jostling us and hustling us on all sides, how could we live, if it were not for the great, calm, scornful anarchists of the soul, whose high inviolable imaginations perpetually refresh and re-create the world?

And we who find this refuge, we who have to win our liberty every day anew by bathing in these classic streams, we too will do well to remember that the most precious things in life are the things that the world can neither give nor take away.

We too—encouraged by these great individualists—have a right to fall back upon whatever individuality may have been left to us; and, resting upon that, sinking into the

soul of that, to defy all that public opinion and the voice of the majority may be able to do.

And we shall be wise also if we recognise, before it is too late, that what is more intrinsic and inalienable in ourselves is just that very portion of us which has nothing to do with our work in life, nothing to do with our duty to the community.

We shall be wise if we recognise, before it is too late, that the thing most sacred in us is that strange margin of unoccupied receptivity, upon which settle, in their flight over land and sea, the beautiful wild birds of unsolicited dreams.

We shall be wise if, before we die, we learn a little of the art of suspending our judgment—the art of "waiting upon the spirit."

For it is only when we have suspended our judgment; it is only when we have suspended our convictions, our principles, our ideals, our moralities, that "the still small voice" of the music of the universe, sad and sweet and terrible and tender, drifts in upon us, over the face of the waters of the soul.

The essence of us, the hidden reality of us, is too rare and delicate a thing to bear the crude weight of these sturdy opinions, these vigorous convictions, these social ardours, without growing dulled and hardened. . . .

It is only when we suspend our judgments and leave arguing and criticising, that the quiet gods of the moonlit shores of the world murmur their secrets in our ears.

PART FOUR

JAMES HUNEKER

I

CONCERNING CRITICS

THE annual rotation of the earth brings to us at least once during its period the threadbare, thriceworn, stale, flat, and academic discussion of critic and artist. We believe comparisons of creator and critic are unprofitable, being for the most part a confounding of intellectual substances. The painter paints, the composer makes music, the sculptor models, and the poet sings. Like the industrious crow the critic hops after these sowers of beauty, content to peck up in the furrows the chance grains dropped by genius. This, at least, is the popular notion. Balzac, and later Disraeli, asked: "After all, what are the critics? Men who have failed in literature and art." And Mascagni, notwithstanding the laurels he wore after his first success, cried aloud in agony that a critic was *compositore mancato*. These be pleasing quotations for them whose early opus has failed to score. The trouble is that every one is a critic, your gallery-god as well as the most stately practitioner of the art severe. Balzac was an excellent critic when he saluted Stendhal's Chartreuse de Parme as a masterpiece; as was Emerson when he wrote to Walt Whitman. What the mid-century critics of the United States, what Sainte-Beuve, master critic of France, did not see, Balzac and Emerson saw and, better still, spoke out. In his light-hearted fashion Oscar Wilde asserted that the critic was also a creator—apart from his literary worth—and we confess that we know

of cases where the critic has created the artist. But that a serious doubt can be entertained as to the relative value of creator and critic is hardly worth denying.

Consider the painters. Time and time again you read or hear the indignant denunciation of some artist whose canvas has been ripped-up in print. If the offender happens to be a man who doesn't paint, then he is called an ignoramus; if he paints or etches, or even sketches in crayon, he is well within the Balzac definition—poor, mierable imbecile, he is only jealous of work that he could never have achieved. As for literary critics, it may be set down once and for all that they are "suspect." They write, ergo, they must be unjust. The dilemma has branching horns. Is there no midway spot, no safety ground for that weary Ishmael the professional critic to escape being gored? Naturally any expression of personal feeling on his part is set down to mental arrogance. He is permitted like the wind to move over the face of the waters, but he must remain unseen. We have always thought that the enthusiastic Dublin man in the theatre gallery was after a critic when he cried aloud at the sight of a toppling companion: "Don't waste him. Kill a fiddler with him!" It seems more in consonance with the Celtic character; besides, the Irish are music-lovers.

If one could draw up the list of critical and creative men in art the scale would not tip evenly. The number of painters who have written of their art is not large, though what they have said is always pregnant. Critics outnumber them—though the battle is really a matter of quality, not quantity. There is Da Vinci. For his complete writings some of us would sacrifice miles of gawky pale and floric mediæval paintings. What we have of him is wisdom, and like true wisdom is prophetic. Then there is that immortal gossip Vasari, a very biased critic and not too nice to his contemporaries. He need not indulge in what is called the woad argument; we shan't go back to the early Britons for our authorities. Let us come to Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose Discourses are invaluable—and also to be taken well salted he was encrusted with fine old English prejudices. One o

his magnificent sayings and one appreciated by the entire artistic tribe was his ejaculation: "Damn paint!" Raphael Mengs wrote. We wish that Velasquez had. What William Blake said of great artists threw much light on William Blake. Ingres uttered things, principally in a rage, about his contemporaries. Delacroix was a thinker. He literally anticipated Chevreul's discoveries in the law of simultaneous contrasts of colour. Furthermore, he wrote profoundly of his art. He appreciated Chopin before many critics and musicians—which would have been an impossible thing for Ingres, though he played the violin—and he was kind to the younger men.

Need we say that Degas is a great wit, though not a writer; a wit and a critic? Rousseau, the landscapist, made notes, and Corot is often quoted. If Millet had never written another sentence but "There is no isolated truth," he would still have been a critic. Constable with his "A good thing is never done twice"; and Alfred Stevens' definition of art, "Nature seen through the prism of an emotion," forestalled Zola's pompous pronouncement in The Experimental Novel. To jump over the stile to literature, Wordsworth wrote critical prefaces, and Shelley, too; Poe was a critic; and what of Coleridge, who called painting "a middle quality between a thought and a thing—the union of that which is nature and that which is exclusively human"? There are plenty of examples on the side of the angels. Whistler! What a critic, wielding a finely chased rapier! Thomas Couture wrote and discoursed much of his art. Sick man as he was, I heard him talk of art at his country home, Villiers-le-Bel, on the Northern Railway, near Paris. This was in 1878. William M. Hunt's talks on art were fruitful. So are John Lafarge's. The discreet Gigoux of Balzac notoriety has an entertaining book to his credit; while Rodin is often coaxed into utterances about his and other men's work. There are many French, English, and American artists who write and paint with equal facility. In New York, Kenyon Cox is an instance. But the chiefest among all the painters alive and dead, one who shines and will continue to shine when his canvases are faded—and they are

fading—is Eugène Fromentin, whose Maîtres d'autrefois is a classic of criticism. Since his day two critics, who are also painters, have essayed both crafts, George Clausen and D. S. MacColl.

Professor Clausen is a temperate critic, MacColl a brilliant, revolutionary one. The critical temper in either man is not dogmatic. Seurat, the French Neo-Impressionist, has defended his theories; indeed, the number of talented Frenchmen who paint well and write with style as well as substance is amazing. Rossetti would no longer be a rare bird in these days of piping painters, musicians who are poets, and sculptors who are painters. The unfortunate critic occasionally writes a play or an opera (particularly in Paris), but as a rule he is content to echo that old German who desperately exclaimed: "Even if I am nothing else, I am at least a contemporary."

Let us now swing around the obverse side of the medal. A good showing. You may begin with Wincklemann or Goethe—we refer entirely to critics of paint and painters—or run down the line to Diderot, Blanc, Gautier, Baudelaire, Zola, Goncourt, who introduced to Europe Japanese art; Roger Marx, Geoffroy, Huysmans, Camille Mauclair, Charles Morice, and Octave Mirbeau. Zola was not a painter, but he praised Edouard Manet. These are a few names hastily selected. In England, Ruskin too long ruled the critical roast; full of thunder-words like Isaiah, his vaticinations led a generation astray. He was a prophet, not a critic, and he was a victim to his own abhorred "pathetic fallacy." Henley was right in declaring that until R. A. M. Stevenson appeared there was no great art criticism in England or English. The "Velasquez" is a marking stone in critical literature. It is the one big book by a big temperament that may be opposed page by page to Fromentin's critical masterpiece. Shall we further adduce the names of Morelli, Sturge Moore, Roger Fry, Perkins, Cortissoz, Lionel Cust, Colvin, Ricci, Van Dyke, Mather, Berenson, Brownell, and George Moore—who said of Ruskin that his uncritical blindness regarding Whistler will constitute his passport to fame, "the lot of critics is to be re-

membered by what they have failed to understand." Walter Pater wrote criticism that is beautiful literature. If Ruskin missed Whistler, he is in good company, for Sainte-Beuve, the prince of critics, missed Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, and to Victor Hugo was unfair. Yet, consider the Osrics embalmed in the amber of Sainte-Beuve's style. He, like many another critic, was superior to his subject. And that is always fatal to the water-flies.

George III once asked in wonderment how the apples got inside the dumplings. How can a critic criticise a creator? The man who looks on writings things about the man who does things. But he criticises and artists owe him much. Neither in "ink-horn terms" nor in an "upstart Asiatic style" need the critic voice his opinions. He must be an artist in temperament and he must have a *credo*. He need not be a painter to write of painting, for his primary appeal is to the public. He is the middle-man, the interpreter, the vulgariser. The psycho-physiological processes need not concern us. One thing is certain—a man writing in terms of literature about painting, an art in two dimensions, cannot interpret fully the meanings of the canvas, nor can he be sure that his opinion, such as it is, when it reaches the reader, will truthfully express either painter or critic. Such are the limitations of one art when it comes to deal with the ideas or material of another. Criticism is at two removes from its theme. Therefore criticism is a make-shift. Therefore, let critics be modest and allow criticism to become an amiable art.

But where now is the painter critic and the professional critic? "Stands Ulster where it did?" Yes, the written and reported words of artists are precious alike to layman and critic. That they prefer painting to writing is only natural; so would the critic if he had the pictorial gift. However, as art is art and not nature, criticism is criticism and not art. It professes to interpret the artist's work, and at best it mirrors his art mingled with the personal temperament (artistic training is, of course, an understood requisite), and when this is the case, God help the artist! As the greater includes the lesser, the artist should permit the

critic to enter, with all due reverence, his sacred domain. Without vanity the one, sympathetic the other. Then the ideal collaboration ensues. Sainte-Beuve says that "criticism by itself can do nothing. The best of it can act only in concert with public feeling . . . we never find more than half the article in print—the other half was written only in the reader's mind." And Professor Walter Raleigh would further limit the "gentle art." "Criticism, after all, is not to legislate, nor to classify, but to raise the dead." The relations between the critic and his public open another vista of the everlasting discussion. Let it be a negligible one now. That painters can get along without professional criticism we know from history, but that they will themselves play the critic is doubtful. And are they any fairer to young talent than official critics? It is an inquiry fraught with significance. Great and small artists have sent forth into the world their pupils. Have they always—as befits honest critics—recognised the pupils of other men, pupils and men both at the opposite pole of their own theories? Recall what Velasquez is reported to have said to Salvator Rosa, according to Boschini and Carl Justi. Salvator had asked the incomparable Spaniard whether he did not think Raphael the best of all the painters he had seen in Italy. Velasquez answered: "Raphael, to be plain with you, for I like to be candid and outspoken, does not please me at all." This purely temperamental judgment does not make of Velasquez either a good or a bad critic. It is interesting as showing us that even a master cannot always render justice to another. Difference engenders hatred, as Stendhal would say.

Can the record of criticism made by plastic artists show a generous Robert Schumann? Schumann discovered many composers from Chopin to Brahms and made their fortunes by his enthusiastic writing about them. In Wagner he met his Waterloo, but every critic has his limitations. There is no Schumann, let the fact be emphasised, among the painter-critics, though quite as much discrimination, ardour of discovery, and acumen may be found among the writings of the men whose names rank high in professional criticism.

And this hedge, we humbly submit, is a rather stiff one to vault for the adherents of criticism written by artists only. Nevertheless, every day of his humble career must the critic pen his *apologia pro vita sua.*

—*Promenades of an Impressionist.*

II

THE LAWBREAKER

Let us drop this old æsthetic rule of thumb and confess that during the last century a new race of artists sprang up from some strange element and, like flying-fish, revealed to a wondering world their composite structures. Thus we find Berlioz painting with his instrumentation; Franz Liszt, Tschaikowsky, and Richard Strauss filling their symphonic poems with drama and poetry, and Richard Wagner inventing an art which he believed to embrace the seven arts. And there is Ibsen, who used the dramatic form as a vehicle for his anarchistic ideas; and Nietzsche, who was such a poet that he was able to sing a mad philosophy into life; and Rossetti, who painted poems and made poetry that is pictorial. Sculpture was the only art that had resisted this universal disintegration, this imbroglio of the arts. No sculptor before Rodin had dared to break the line, dared to shiver the syntax of stone. For sculpture is a static, not a dynamic art—is it not? Let us observe the rules, though we preserve the chill spirit of the cemetery. What Mallarmé attempted to do with French poetry Rodin accomplished in clay. His marbles do not represent but present emotion, are the evocation of emotion itself; as in music, form and substance coalesce. If he does not, as did Mallarmé, arouse "the silent thunder afloat in the leaves," he can summon from the vasty deep the spirits of love, hate, pain, despair, sin, beauty, ecstasy; above all, ecstasy. Now the primal gift of ecstasy is bestowed upon few. In our age Keats had it, and Shelley; Byron, despite his passion, missed it, and so did Wordsworth. We find it in Swinburne, he had it from the first; but few French poets have it. Like the "cold devils" of Félicien Rops, coiled in frozen ecstasy, the

blasts of hell about them, Charles Baudelaire can boast the dangerous attribute. Poe and Heine knew ecstasy, and Liszt also; Wagner was the master adept of his century. Tschaikowsky followed him close! and in the tiny piano scores of Chopin ecstasy is pinioned in a few bars, the soul often rapt to heaven in a phrase. Richard Strauss has shown a rare variation on the theme of ecstasy; voluptuousness troubled by pain, the soul tormented by stranger nuances.

Rodin is of this tormented choir; he is master of its psychology. It may be the decadence, as any art is in decadence which stakes the parts against the whole. The same was said of Beethoven by the followers of Haydn, and the successors of Richard Strauss will be surely abused quite as violently as the Wagnerites abuse Strauss to-day—employing against him the same critical artillery employed against Wagner. That this ecstasy should be aroused by pictures of love and death, as in the case of Poe and Baudelaire, Wagner and Strauss, must not be adjudged as a black crime. In the Far East they hypnotise neophytes with a bit of broken mirror, for in the kingdom of art, as in the Kingdom of Heaven, there are many mansions. Possibly it was a relic of his early admiration and study of Baudelaire that set Wagner to extorting ecstasy from his orchestra by images of death and love; and no doubt the temperament which seeks such combinations—a temperament commoner in mediæval days than ours—was inherent in Wagner. He makes his Isolde sing mournfully and madly over a corpse and, throwing herself upon the dead body of Tristan, die shaken by the sweet cruel pains of love. Richard Strauss closely patterns after Wagner in his Salome, there is the head of a dead man, and there is the same dissolving ecstasy. Both men play with similar counters—love and death, and death and love. And so Rodin. In Pisa we may see (attributed by Vasari) Orcagna's fresco of the Triumph of Death. The sting of the flesh and the way of all flesh are inextricably blended in Rodin's Gate of Hell. His principal reading for forty years has been Dante and Baudelaire. The Divine Comedy and Les Fleurs du Mal are the key-notes in this white symphony of Auguste Rodin's. Love

and life and bitterness and death rule the themes of his marbles. Like Beethoven and Wagner he breaks the academic laws of his art, but then he is Rodin, and where he achieves magnificently lesser men would miserably perish. His large tumultuous music is for his chisel alone to ring out and sing.

—*Promenades of an Impressionist.*

JOEL ELIAS SPINGARN

I

ART AS EXPRESSION

With the Romantic Movement there developed the new idea which coördinates all Criticism in the nineteenth century. Very early in the century, Mme. de Staël and others formulated the idea that literature is an "expression of society." Victor Cousin founded the school of art for art's sake, enunciating "the fundamental rule, that expression is the supreme law of art." Later, Sainte-Beuve developed and illustrated his theory that literature is an expression of personality. Still later, under the influence of natural science, Taine took a hint from Hegel and elaborated the idea that literature is an expression of race, age, and environment. The extreme impressionists prefer to think of art as the exquisite expression of delicate and fluctuating sensations or impressions of life. But for all these critics and theorists, literature is an expression of something, of experience or emotion, of the external or internal, of the man himself or something outside the man; yet it is always conceived of as an art of expression.

The objective, the dogmatic, the impressionistic critics of our day may set for themselves very different tasks, but the idea of expression is implicit in all they write. They have, as it were, this bond of blood: they are not merely man and woman, but brother and sister; and their father, or grandfather, was Sainte-Beuve. The bitter but acute analysis of his talent which Nietzsche has given us in the *Twilight of the Idols* brings out very clearly this dual side of his seminal power, the feminine sensitiveness and the masculine detachment. For Nietzsche, he is "nothing of a man; he wanders about, delicate, curious, tired, pumping people, a female

after all, with a woman's revengefulness and a woman's sensuousness, a critic without a standard, without firmness, and without backbone." Here it is the impressionist in Sainte-Beuve that arouses the German's wrath. But in the same breath we find Nietzsche blaming him for "holding up objectivity as a mask"; and it is on this objective side that Sainte-Beuve becomes the source of all those historical and psychological forms of critical study which have influenced the academic thought of our day, leading insensibly, but inevitably, from empirical investigation to empirical law. The pedigree of the two schools thereafter is not difficult to trace; on the one side, from Sainte-Beuve through *l'art pour l'art* to impressionism, and on the other from Sainte-Beuve through Taine to Brunetière and his egregious kin.

French criticism has been leaning heavily on the idea of expression for a century or more, but no attempt has been made in France to understand its æsthetic content, except for a few vague echoes of German thought. For the first to give philosophic precision to the theory of expression, and to found a method of Criticism based upon it, were the Germans of the age that stretches from Herder to Hegel. All the forces of philosophical thought were focused on this central concept, while the critics enriched themselves from out this golden store. I suppose you all remember the famous passage in which Carlyle describes the achievement of German criticism in the age. "Criticism," says Carlyle, "has assumed a new form in Germany. It proceeds on other principles and proposes to itself a higher aim. The main question is not now a question concerning the qualities of diction, the coherence of metaphors, the fitness of sentiments, the general logical truth in a work of art, as it was some half century ago among most critics, neither is it a question mainly of a psychological sort to be answered by discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry, as is usual with the best of our own critics at present; but it is, not indeed exclusively, but inclusively, of its two other questions, properly and ultimately a question of the essence and peculiar life of the poetry itself. . . . The problem is not now to determine by what mech-

anism Addison composed sentences and struck out similitudes, but by what far finer and more mysterious mechanism Shakespeare organized his dramas and gave life and individuality to his Ariel and his Hamlet. Wherein lies that life; how have they attained that shape and individuality? Whence comes that empyrean fire which irradiates their whole being, and pierces, at least in starry gleams, like a diviner thing, into all hearts? Are these dramas of his not verisimilar only, but true; nay, truer than reality itself, since the essence of unmixed reality is bodied forth in them under more expressive similes? What is this unity of pleasures; and can our deeper inspection discern it to be indivisible and existing by necessity because each work springs as it were from the general elements of thought and grows up therefrom into form and expansion by its own growth? Not only who was the poet and how did he compose, but what and how was the poem, and why was it a poem and not rhymed eloquence, creation and not figured passion? These are the questions for the critic. Criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired; between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words, and catch some glimpse of their material meaning, but understand not their deeper import."

I am afraid that no German critic wholly realized this ideal; but it was at least the achievement of the Germans that they enunciated the doctrine, even if they did not always adequately illustrate it in practice. It was they who first realized that art has performed its function when it has expressed itself; it was they who first conceived of Criticism as the study of expression. "There is a destructive and a creative or constructive criticism," said Goethe; the first measures and tests literature according to mechanical standards, the second answers the fundamental questions: "What has the writer proposed to himself to do? and how far has he succeeded in carrying out his own plan?" Carlyle, in his essay on Goethe, almost uses Goethe's own words, when he says that the critic's first and foremost duty is to make plain to himself "what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his

eye, and how far, with such materials as were afforded him, he has fulfilled it."

This has been the central problem, the guiding star, of all modern criticism. From Coleridge to Pater, from Sainte-Beuve to Lemaître, this is what critics have been striving for, even when they have not succeeded; yes, even when they have been deceiving thmselves into thinking that they were striving for something else. This was not the ideal of the critics of Aristotle's day, who, like so many of their successors, censured a work of art as "irrational, impossible, morally hurtful, self-contradictory, or contrary to technical correctness." This was not Boileau's standard when he blamed Tasso for the introduction of Christian rather than pagan mythology into epic poetry; nor Addison's when he tested *Paradise Lost* according to the rules of Le Bossu; nor Dr. Johnson's, when he lamented the absence of poetic justice in *King Lear,* or pronounced dogmatically that the poet should not "number the streaks of the tulip." What has the poet tried to do, and how has he fulfilled his intention? What is he striving to express and how has he expressed it? What impression does his work make on me, and how can I best express this impression? These are the questions that modern critics have been taught to ask when face to face with the work of a poet. Only one *caveat* must be borne in mind when attempting to answer them: the poet's intentions must be judged at the moment of the creative act, as mirrored in the work of art itself, and not by the vague ambitions which he imagines to be his real intentions before or after the creative act is achieved.

—*Creative Criticism.*

II

THE SEVEN ARTS AND THE SEVEN CONFUSIONS

THERE are as many arts as there are artists—the number is not seven, but countless as the stars. We group them in constellation for our convenience, not theirs; seven

units are more easily handled than a trillion. The confusions in regard to them are countless too; the actual number is far greater; but they may also be gathered for our convenience into seven groups,—"seven" has the perfume of a mystic tradition kept fragrant by the superstition of generations of men. So I begin with a roll-call of them all: Poets write for money; poets are influenced by their environment; poets write in meters; poets write tragedies and comedies; poets are moral or immoral; poets are democratic or aristocratic; poets use figures of speech.

The first of the Seven Confusions, then, is this, that "Poets write for money." This is only one way of stating a misconception of the nature of art that might be phrased in a hundred different ways. The most common form today is perhaps this: "Plays are written to be read, not acted." We are not concerned with the fact (if it be a fact) but with its implication for criticism.

The poet may find that a brisk walk stimulates his writing, or that he can write more easily when he has smoked a cigarette. The walk or the cigarette has not produced the poetry; it has simply served as a stimulus to the personality that creates the poetry. It opens the faucet, but neither produces nor modifies the water that pours out. Other poets find that they can not write easily without the stimulus of imagined reward—money, the plaudits of the crowd, the resplendent beauty of theatrical performance. But men with the same ambitions write different poems or plays, and in this difference lies the real secret of art. For after all, whatever the imaginary stimulus, there is only one real urge in the poet's soul, to express what is in him. To trifle with the plumbing, after the faucet has been turned on, instead of drinking the water, is hardly the function of the critic or the lover of art. To say, therefore, that poets write for money, that playwrights write for the stage, that painters paint to be "hung," is to confuse mere stimulus with creative impulse.

The second confusion that "poets are the product of their environment," is a twisted corollary of the first. We need not quarrel with the statement so long as it remains sus-

pended in the air, as a vague generalization that can do no harm unless it carries with it the further implication that a study of the environment helps us to understand the poetry. Not what the poet's environment may have been, but what he has made out of it, is what interests us in a poem. The secret of a unique personality (if one may use the phrase when personality means nothing but uniqueness) is what the reader enjoys and the critic seeks to discover. Sociologists may trouble themselves about external and superficial resemblance between artists or groups of artists; æsthetic critics are concerned only with the unbridgeable differences. To look for a poet's power outside of his work rather than in it, to assume that his relation to his environment is of any concern whatever to a lover or critic of poetry, is to confuse criticism and sociology.

The most deeply imbedded superstition in regard to art, however, is concerned with its external form. The third confusion, that "Poets write in meters," is therefore one of the oldest of all the confusions. Aesthetic theorists have waged a battle against it, from the days of Aristotle, who said that poetry is distinguished from history by something more essential than meter, and that the history of Herodotus would remain history even if written in verse, to our own day, when Benedetto Croce, the only modern who may be mentioned in the same breath with him, has left the old confusion without any ground to stand on. The fact is that there is no real distinction between prose and verse. Out of the infinite varieties of rhythm in human speech, it is possible, for convenience sake, to separate the more regular from the more irregular, and to call one verse and the other prose: to say where one ends and the other begins is impossible. But to build a system on these empirical and convenient classifications is to confuse superficial likenesses with the realities of creative art. For after all no two poets write in the same meter. I may imagine that I am writing an iambic pentameter, or a line with a certain succession of beats and accents, but in reality I am creating a new line. If that line is good it is because of some special virtue of its own, and not because of some imaginary and purely

external resemblance to something else. Poets do not use old meters, but each poet creates rhythms of his own.

What is true of meter is also true of language itself. To speak of "learning a language" is to risk the danger of the same confusion; we do not learn language, we learn how to create it. That is why it is so wide of the mark to say, as Max Eastman does, that to "sail into a man" is or is not a good expression because it means the same as the Lantinism "to inveigh against a man." "Inveigh" may etymologically mean "sail into"; but if language is a living thing—a form of art, not to be torn from its context or understood outside of it—the Latin words help to explain the English as much as the disinterred skeleton of a thirteenth century English yeoman helps us to understand the personality of Max Eastman. It is inconceivable that a modern thinker should still adhere to abstract tests of good expression, when it is obvious that we can only tell whether it is good or bad when we see it in its natural context. Is any word artistically bad in itself? Is not "ain't" an excellent expression when placed in the mouth of an illiterate character in a play or story? To deal with abstract classification instead of the real thing—versification instead of poetry, grammar instead of language, technique instead of painting—is to be guilty of confusing form as concrete expression with form as a dead husk.

The fourth confusion may be summed up in the phrase: "Poets writes tragedies or comedies." It is true that poets set out with the intention of writing them, although they have only the vaguest idea of what they mean by the terms; and it is equally true that their work may be impeded by false conceptions of these literary forms. But fortunately for us, their real achievement is independent of this confused ambition. Tragedy, comedy, lyric, epic, and other words of this sort, are simply convenient ways of classifying works of art, just as books may be classified as tall or small, cloth-bound or morocco-bound, for the purpose of arrangement in libraries, or men may be classified as tall or small for the purpose of arrangement in a company of soldiers. We shall always find these terms useful, in poetry

no less than in libraries or regiments, and the confusion arises only when it is implied (as is almost always implied) that the classification is not merely a matter of convenience, but a law of art by which poems are to be judged. For example, a critic studies a number of poems having a certain resemblance and called tragedies; out of this study he evolves a "law of tragedy" and then attempts to impose it on the first poet who writes another poem of somewhat the same kind. "Sir," we hear him say throughout the ages, "you have disregarded all the laws of good tragedy, and your poem is therefore no good." The poet's answer should be a very simple one: "There are no laws of good tragedy; there are only good or bad poems." No rule, no theory, no "law" coined by critics or scholars has any validity for the poet in the creative act, and when that act is completed and the poem achieved, the critic must make his theory of tragedy chime with the new poet's poem, not the poem with the theory. Only in one sense has any of these terms any profound significance, and that is the use of the word "lyric" to represent the free expressiveness of all art. The Divine Comedy, Lear, Michaelangelo's David, a Corot landscape, or a Bach fugue is as truly lyric as any of the scripts of Heine or Shelley.

The fifth confusion that "Poets are moral or immoral," is also world-old. We should no longer banish poets from an ideal Republic because of the immorality of their art, as Plato did, but most of us still confuse art with morals. To say that poetry is moral or immoral is as meaningless as to say that an equilateral triangle is moral and an isosceles triangle immoral. Surely we must realize the absurdity of testing anything by a standard which does not belong to it or a purpose for which it was not intended. Imagine these whiffs of conversation at a dinner table: "This cauliflower would be excellent if it had only been prepared in accordance with international law." "Do you know why my cook's pastry is so good? He has never told a lie or seduced a woman." But why multiply obvious examples? We do not concern ourselves with morals when we test the engineer's bridge or the scientist's researches; indeed we

go farther, and say that it is the moral duty of the scientist to disregard morals in his search for truth. As a man he may be judged by moral standards, but the truth of his conclusions can only be judged by the standard of science. Beauty's world is remote from both these standards; she aims neither at morals nor at truth. Her imaginary creations, by definition, make no pretense to reality, and cannot be judged by reality's tests. Art is expression, and poets succeed or fail by their success or failure in completely and perfectly expressing themselves. If the ideals they express are not the ideals we admire most, we must blame not the poets but ourselves; in the world where morals count we have failed to give them the proper material out of which to rear a nobler edifice. To separate art and morality is not to destroy moral values but to augment them—to give them increased powers and a new freedom in the realm in which they have the right to reign.

In modern America it would be strange if our practical hopes did not lead us into a sixth confusion—that "Poets are democratic or aristocratic"—as if art were concerned with the political program of the poet any more than with his moral standards. It is easy to sneer at Shakespeare and Dante as "reactionaries," but it is difficult to see what this has to do with the quality of their poetry, unless we are to assume that only men of our own political or economic convictions can be good poets. It is as hard to write a good poem on democracy as on aristocracy; also, it would seem even harder, if we may judge from the experience of poets. To find fault with the past because it is not exactly like the present is as good a test as one needs of a shallow mind, and to find fault with good poetry because it is not good political science or good sociology is a fairly serviceable test of the incompetent critic. It is not the purpose of poetry to further the cause of demorcacy, or any other practical "cause," any more than it is the purpose of bridge-building to further the cause of Esperanto. If a poet consecrates himself to the spread of democratic ideals, his work still remains to be tested by the standards of art, not of politics. Criticism is concerned with the question, "Has he written

a good poem?" and is not helped in its decision by the answer to a wholly different and indifferent question: "Is he a Democrat, a Conservative, a Socialist, or a psychoanalyst?"

Somewhat similar is the attempt of critics to determine the subject-matter of poetry, no less than the political convictions of poets. It is an old illusion: in the seventeenth century, for example, Boileau belabored the poets who had the temerity to prefer Christian to Greek mythology. Today the critics are insisting on the use of contemporary material, and are praising the poets whose subjects are drawn from the life of their own time. But even if it were possible for critics to impose subjects on poets, how can the poets deal with anything but contemporary material? How can a twentieth century poet, even when he imagines that he is concerned with early Greek or Egyptian life, deal with any subject but the life of his own time, except in the most external and superficial detail? Cynical critics have said since the first outpouring of men's hearts, "There is nothing new in art; there are no new subjects for the poets." But the very reverse is true. There are no old subjects; every subject is new as soon as it has been transformed by the imagination of the poet.

Finally, there is the confusion which is represented by the statement that "Poets write metaphors." Poets write a good many things, so many that it is hard to say what they do write; frequently they even write nonsense; but one thing we may be sure they do not write, and that is the impossible. Metaphors are myths created by grammarians which have no reality in the poet's world or any other. The misconception involved in these "figures of speech" is that style is something separate from the work of art and not part and parcel of its inner being. It is conceived as an ornament to be added to or substracted from expression instead of as expression itself. If "lion-hearted" be only another way of saying "brave," why use one rather than the other? Or if they mean something different, however, slight, why say that one is used for the other at all? We have inherited these figures from the old Greek rhetoricians,

and in any theory of style as concrete expression they have no place. Every phrase is a thing in itself, always indefinably new, wherever it may be, never representing anything but itself in the exact context where it is found for the first and only time. It can never be exactly the same, even when it is used again in the same passage; and, it has been well said that the word "love" in Dante's famous line,

"Amor, che a nullo amato amar perdona,"

is not the same word thrice repeated, but must be considered artistically as three separate and distinct expressions.

The misconception involved in all these "confusions" is the same—it is to mistake anatomy for personality, the husk for the core, the dead for the living, abstractions for realities, non-art for art.

—*"The Seven Arts."* (*March, 1917.*)

H. L. MENCKEN

THE HOMILETICS OF CRITICISM

EVERY now and then, a sense of the futility of their daily endeavors falling suddenly upon them, the critics of Christendom turn to a somewhat sour and depressing consideration of the nature and objects of their own craft. That is to say, they turn to criticising criticism. What is it, in plain words? What is its aim, exactly stated in legal terms? How far can it go? What good can it do? What is its normal effect upon the artist and the work of art?

Such a spell of self-searching has been in progress for several years past, and the critics of various countries have contributed theories of more or less lucidity and plausibility to the discussion. Their views of their own art, it appears, are quite as divergent as their views of the arts they more commonly deal with. One group argues, partly by direct statement and partly by attacking all other groups, that the one defensible purpose of the critic is to encourage the virtuous and oppose the sinful—in brief, to police the fine arts and so hold them in tune with the moral order of the world. Another group, repudiating this constabulary functions, argues hotly that the arts have nothing to do with morality whatsoever—that their concern is solely with pure beauty. A third group holds that the chief aspect of a work of art, particularly in the field of literature, is its aspect as a psychological document—that if it doesn't help men to know themselves it is nothing. A fourth group reduces the thing to an exact science, and sets up standards that resemble algebraic formulæ—this is the group of metrists, of contrapuntists and of those who gabble of light-waves. And so, in order, follow groups five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, each with its theory and its proofs. . . .

The Spingarn-Croce-Carlyle-Goethe theory, for instance, throws a heavy burden upon the critic. It presupposes that he is a civilized and tolerant man, hospitable to all intelligible ideas and capable of reading them as he runs. This is a demand that at once rules out nine-tenths of the grown-up sophomores who carry on the business of criticism in America. Their trouble is simply that they lack the intellectual resilience necessary for taking in ideas, and particularly new ideas. The only way they can ingest one is by transforming it into the nearest related formula—usually a harsh and devastating operation. This fact accounts for their chronic inability to understand all that is most personal and original and hence most forceful and significant in the emerging literature of the country. They can get down what has been digested and redigested, and so brought into forms that they know, and carefully labelled by predecessors of their own sort—but they exhibit alarm immediately they come into the presence of the extraordinary. Here we have an explanation of Brownell's alarmed appeal for a tightening of standards—*i. e.,* a larger respect for precedents, patterns, rubber-stamps— and here we have an explanation of Phelps's inability to comprehend the colossal phenomenon of Dreiser, and of Boynton's childish nonsense about realism, and of Sherman's effort to apply the Espionage Law to the arts, and of More's querulous enmity to romanticism, and of all the fatuous pigeon-holing that passes for criticism in the more solemn literary weeklies.

As practised by all such learned and diligent but essentially ignorant and unimaginative men, criticism is little more than a branch of homiletics. They judge a work of art, not by its clarity and sincerity, not by the force and charm of its ideas, not by the technical virtuosity of the artist, not by his originality and artistic courage, but simply and solely by his orthodoxy. If he is what is called a "right thinker," if he devotes himself to advocating the transient platitudes in a conventional manner, then he is worthy of respect. But if he lets fall the slightest hint that he is in doubt about any of them, or, worse still, that he is indifferent, then he is a scoundrel, and hence, by their theory,

a bad artist. Such pious piffle is horribly familiar among us; I do not exaggerate its terms. You will find it running through the critical writings of practically all the dull fellows who combine criticism with tutoring; in the works of many of them it is stated in the plainest way and defended with much heat, theological and pedagogical. In its baldest form it shows itself in the doctrine that it is scandalous for an artist—say a dramatist or a novelist—to depict vice as attractive. The fact that vice, more often than not, undoubtedly *is* attractive—else why should it ever gobble any of us?—is disposed of with a lofty gesture. What of it? say these birchmen. The artist is not a reporter, but a Great Teacher. It is not his business to depict the world as it is, but as it ought to be.

Against this notion American criticism makes but feeble headway. We are, in fact, a nation of evangelists: every third American devotes himself to improving and lifting up his fellow-citizens, usually by force; the messianic delusion is our national disease. Thus the moral *Privatdozenten* have the crowd on their side, and it is difficult to shake their authority, even the vicious are still in favor of crying vice down. "Here is a novel," says the artist. "Why didn't you write a tract?" roars the professor— and down the chute go novel and novelist. "This girl is pretty," says the painter. "But she has left off her undershirt," protests the head-master—and off goes the poor dauber's head. At its mildest, this balderdash takes the form of the late Hamilton Wright Mabie's "White List of Books"; at its worst, it is comstockery, an idiotic and abominable thing. Genuine criticism is as impossible to such inordinately narrow and cocksure men as music is to a man who is stone-deaf. The critic, to interpret his artist, even to understand his artist, must be able to get into the mind of his artist; he must feel and comprehend the vast pressure of the creative passion; as Spingarn says, "æsthetic judgment and artistic creation are instinct with the same vital life." This is why all the best criticism of the world has been written by men who have had within them not only the reflective and analytical faculty of critics but also the gusto of artists—

Goethe, Carlyle, Lessing, Schlegel, Sainte-Beuve, and, to drop a story or two, Hazlitt, Hermann Bahr, Georg Brandes and James Huneker. Huneker, tackling "Also sprach Zarathustra," revealed its content in illuminating flashes. But tackled by Paul Elmer More, it became no more than a dull student's exercise, ill-naturedly corrected. . . .

—*Prejudices.*

II

THE CRITIC'S FUNCTION

Criticism, as humanly practised, must needs fall a good deal short of the intuitive re-creation of beauty, and what is more, it must go a good deal further. For one thing, it must be interpretation in terms that are not only exact but are also comprehensible to the vulgar, else it will leave the original mystery as dark as before—and once interpretation comes in, paraphrase and transliteration comes in. What is recondite must be made plainer; the transcendental, to some extent at least, must be done into common modes of thinking. Well, what are morality, trochaics, hexameters, movements, historical principles, psychological maxims, the dramatic unities—what are all these save common modes of thinking, short cuts, rubber stamps, words of one syllable? Moreover, beauty as we know it in this world is by no means an apparition *in vacuo*. It has its social, its political, even its moral implications. The finale of Beethoven's C minor symphony is not only colossal as music: it is also colossal as revolt and defiance; it says something against something. Yet more, the springs of beauty are not within itself alone, nor even in genius alone, but often in things without. Brahms wrote his Deutsches Requiem, not only because he was a great artist, but also because he was a good German. And in Nietzsche there are times when the divine afflatus takes a back seat, and the *spirochaete* have the floor. . . .

I think the best feasible practise of criticism at least in America, is to be found in certain chapters of Huneker, a critic of vastly more solid influence and of infinitely more

value to the arts than all the prating pedagogues since Rufus Griswold. Here, as in the case of Poe, a sensitive and intelligent artist recreates the work of other artists, but there also comes to the ceremony a man of the world, and the things he has to say are apposite and instructive too. To denounce moralizing out of hand is to pronounce a moral judgment. To dispute the categories is to set up a new anti-categorical category. And to admire the work of Shakespeare is to be interested in his handling of blank verse, his social aspirations, his shot-gun marriage and his frequent concessions to the bombastic frenzy of his actors, and to have some curiosity about Mr. W. H. The really competent critic must be an empiricist. He must conduct his exploration with whatever means lie within the bounds of his personal limitation. He must produce his effects with whatever tools will work. If pills fail, he gets out his saw. If the saw won't cut, he seizes a club. . . .

The function of a genuine critic of the arts is to provoke the reaction between the work of art and the spectator. The spectator, untutored, stands unmoved; he sees the work of art, but it fails to make any intelligible impression on him; if he were spontaneously sensitive to it, there would be no need for criticism. But now comes the critic with his catalysis. He makes the work of art live for the spectator; he makes the spectator live for the work of art. Out of the process comes understanding, appreciation, intelligent enjoyment—and that is precisely what the artist tried to produce.

—*Prejudices.*

III

THE PURITAN AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

The American, save in moments of conscious and swiftly lamented deviltry, casts up all ponderable values, including even the values of beauty, in terms of right and wrong. He is beyond all things else, a judge and a policeman; he believes firmly that there is a mysterious power in law; he

supports and embellishes its operation with a fanatical vigilance.

Naturally enough, this moral obsession has given a strong colour to American literature. In truth, it has coloured it so brilliantly that American literature is set off sharply from all other literatures. In none other will you find so wholesale and ecstatic a sacrifice of æsthetic ideas, of all the fine gusto of passion and beauty, to notions of what is meet, proper and nice. From the books of grisly sermons that were the first American contribution to letters down to that amazing literature of "inspiration" which now flowers so prodigiously, with two literary Presidents among its chief virtuosi, one observes no relaxation of the moral pressure. In the history of every other literature there have been periods of what might be called moral innocence—periods in which a naif *joie de vivre* has broken through all concepts of duty and responsibility, and the wonder and glory of the the universe have been hymned with unashamed zest. The age of Shakespeare comes to mind at once: the violence of the Puritan reaction offers a measure of the pendulum's wild swing. But in America no such general rising of the blood has ever been seen. The literature of the nation, even the literature of the enlightened minority, has been under harsh Puritan restraints from the beginning, and despite a few stealthy efforts at revolt—usually quite without artistic value or even common honesty, as in the case of the cheap fiction magazines and that of smutty plays on Broadway, and always very short-lived—it shows not the slightest sign of emancipating itself today. The American, try as he will, can never imagine any work of the imagination as wholly devoid of moral content. It must either tend toward the promotion of virtue, or be suspect and abominable.

If any doubt of this is in your mind, turn to the critical articles in the newspapers and literary weeklies; you will encounter enough proofs in a month's explorations to convince you forever. A novel or a play is judged among us, not by its dignity of conception, its artistic honesty, its perfection of workmanship, but almost entirely by its ortho-

doxy of doctrine, its platitudinousness, its usefulness as a moral tract. A digest of the review of such a book as David Graham Phillips' "Susan Lenox" or of such a play as Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" would make astounding reading for a Continental European. Not only the childish incompetents who write for the daily press, but also most of our critics of experience and reputation, seem quite unable to estimate a piece of writing as a piece of writing, a work of art as a work of art; they almost inevitably drag in irrelevant gabble as to whether this or that personage in it is respectable, or this or that situation in accordance with the national notions of what is edifying and nice. Fully nine-tenths of the reviews of Dreiser's "The Titan," without question the best American novel of its year, were devoted chiefly to indignant denunciations of the morals of Frank Cowperwood, its central character. That the man was superbly imagined and magnificently depicted, that he stood out from the book in all the flashing vigour of life, that his creation was an artistic achievement of a very high and difficult order—these facts seem to have made no impression upon the reviewers whatever. They were Puritans writing for Puritans, and all they could see in Cowperwood was an anti-Puritan, and in his creator another. It will remain for Europeans, I daresay, to discover the true stature of "The Titan," as it remained for Europeans to discover the true stature of "Sister Carrie."

—*A Book of Prefaces.*

LUDWIG LEWISOHN

I

LITERATURE AND LIFE

I

THE fact that verse, being easily remembered, commemorates more enduringly the high deeds of men, still seemed to the most cultivated of the ancients the proper defense of imaginative literature. They use the didactic argument, of course, telling us that poetry teaches by examples and, in a well-known but thoroughly artificial passage, Cicero expresses his sense of the solace of humane studies for every age and every condition of life. He strikes a deeper note, however, when he speaks of the oblivion which, but for the light of literature, would have overtaken the best and noblest things "*quae jacerent in tenebris omnia, nisi litterarum lumen accideret.*" And Horace repeats that note in well-known verses full of a tragic regret over those "unwept-for, unknown" heroes who are "weighed down by the long night, because they lacked a sacred poet." To perpetuate the images of the brave and beautiful for whom the brief sunlight was at an end, seemed to these Romans, so modern in other ways, the gravest function of literature and its most important relation to human life.

Christianity changed all that. It made life infinite in extent but perfectly rigid in character. It split up the life-process into two elements at war and forced literature to illustrate didactically the hierarchy of virtues and vices which symbolized that eternal conflict. The poet of the Christian ages wrote not to discover or interpret reality but to illustrate a superimposed theory of right and holy living.

It is important to grasp this fact. A good deal of modern imaginative literature still pursues the mediaeval method of showing a specific hierarchy of virtues triumphant and one of vices discomfited, and keeps its vision fixed upon a theory of conduct rather than upon the facts of life. The idealistic critic of to-day, Mr. P. E. More, for instance, shielding himself with Plato, precisely as thoughtful men did in the early Christian centuries, still insists with an ancestral ardor that literature shall not grow out of the soil of the homely earth, but shall be gathered like manna, from the sky. . . . It is only in the great love stories of the middle ages, the stories of Lancelot and Guinevere, Tristran and Iseult, Paolo and Francesca, that the human heart, transcending the absolute moral dualism of Christianity, affirms and, in some tragic or fantastic fashion, justifies itself.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the literature of the renaissance discovered the concrete. Its criticism, on the non-technical side, is a curious blend of ancient and mediaeval didacticism. But it did acquire a very deep sense of certain universal situations and emotions. It individualized the universal tragedy of old age in "Lear," of jealousy in "Othello"; it realized with immense poignancy the pathos of life's fleetingness, and expresses the Horatian feeling concerning the "too brief flowers of the lovely rose—*nimium breves flores amœnæ rosæ*"—in forms that range from the murmuring cadences of Ronsard's sonnets to the late and iron music of Andrew Marvel:

> "But at my back I always hear
> Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near."

Nearly all the lyrical motifs of the renaissance, in truth, may be found in Catullus or Horace or Martial. While the ballads of England and the folk songs of Germany were obscure and despised, the conscious poets of the age gave their individual expression of the universal emotions hinted at in the poetry of the Romans. Rarely is the process reversed as in that single astonishing sonnet of Michael

Drayton where at last a poet, to use Hazlitt's stirring phrase, "had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man."

The practice of the renaissance of individualizing universal experiences was raised into a dogma by the Enlightenment, the age of prose and reason. Literature deliberately concerned itself for more than a century with the typical, the general—with man, not with men. From La Bruyère to Voltaire and from Congreve to Johnson it is busy with the personification of moral qualities. And the neo-classicists were almost as concerned with their conception of the good—irrespective of experience—as the writers of the thirteenth century had been. The voice of an intimate experience, as it is heard in Pope's "Epistle to Augustus," sounds in that age with a quality strangely moving, and Johnson's dislike of Fielding symbolizes the classicist's aversion from the fearlessly concrete in creative literature.

It was the French Revolution that set free the individual; it was romanticism that shifted the center of literary experience from the species to the person and from the world of abstract morality to the impassioned soul. It was the aim of the romantic writer, as Hegel observed, "to utter his intimate being to the world and to realize himself through such utterance"; it was, as Alfred de Musset put it: *"Eterniser peut-être un rêve d'un instant";* it was, in the pregnant saying of Novalis: "To be alone with all that one loves" and thus, in Shelley's summing up, "to awaken in others sensations like those which animate one's own bosom." To these statements of the relation of literature to life little that is vital has been added. The spirit of liberty has shifted from the political to the economic and moral field: naturalism has applied the romantic's observation of himself to his fellow-men. The fundamental distinction, profound in import, infinite in implication, was established: the literature of the historic past gives the individual artist's expression of a moral theory or a universal experience, modern literature his immediate vision of the personal and the concrete.

The spirit of modern literature cannot be rendered into

speech more justly than in Hazlitt's magnificent and neglected passage on Montaigne: "He neither supposed that he was bound to know all things, nor that all things were bound to conform to what he had fancied or would have them to be. In treating of men and manners, he spoke of them as he found them, not according to preconceived notions and abstract dogmas; and he began by teaching us what he himself was. . . . He wrote not to make converts to established creeds and prejudices, but to satisfy his own mind of the truth of things." To the question what, in such a view of literature, becomes of a universal appeal to the spirit of mankind, the final answer is to be found in Goethe's: "All that happens is a symbol and, by representing itself perfectly, it reveals the significance of all else." Thus the long contradiction between literature and experience tends to disappear. Art is no longer, like an outworn moral system, superimposed upon experience, but grows out of it, is part of it and becomes, as Hebbel said, "the highest form of life."

2

I have set down these historical considerations in order to make, I hope, a very vivid use of them, and to show their burning importance to the society in which we live. We are surrounded by great quantities of printed matter and there are people who believe that literature flourishes in our midst. Unhappily this mass of writing does not, except in the rarest instances, touch our lives. Its method is either frankly mediaeval, illustrating in temper and result a preconceived system of moral categories; or else it is written in the service of that smug and hollow moral perfectionism which is the most unpleasant quality of the eighteenth century. The first of these two methods is found in nearly all our very popular fiction and plays and would be negligible if it did not enjoy, as it does in no other country in the world, the patronage of the formally educated. The second is all but universally present in those more serious pieces of imaginative writings—the novels of Winston Churchill, for example

—which are current among the cultured classes. Here the harsh and tonic weather of reality is not always avoided. Life is permitted to crystallise itself in art. But before the form is perfect, a hammer, half-didactic, half-emotional, shatters it in order that the reader may end on the note of belief in the most perfect of democracies in the best of all possible worlds. As that incorruptible and lamented spirit Randolph Bourne wrote of William Allen White's "In the Heart of a Fool": "After painting a long picture of community superstition and ferocity that would disgrace a Central African village—riot and hatred and atrocious murder —Mr. White takes the Great War, rubs it like an eraser over the smutched and hideous page, and lo! all is fair and clean again."

The explanation for this state of affairs is to be sought, of course, in the temper of the American reader. He is, like the mediaevals, accustomed to facile edification and, like the men of the Enlightenment, careless of history and robustly optimistic. But he has neither the mystical passion of the one, nor the other's superb reliance upon the power of the reason. He is an absolutist in morals, rather tolerant of defections that are not found out, and a pragmatist in business and politics. Since his methods in the latter seem to have paid, he stamps them as truth and is thus fortified as by triple steel against any literary or philosophical assault. But since he is, after all, very human, and since the inner rigidness which is his pride and the price of his security is found to be, often enough, at the mercy of gusts of wilder, freer and nobler instincts, he insists—blandly, at best, with coldly fierce intolerance, at worst—that art shall sustain him in his security, minister to his prosperous self-content, enforce the triple-plated armor about his all-too-human soul. Thus it comes about that the average American business man, the average American professional man, desires the books and magazines of his leisure hours to be either as frankly unrelated to life as vaudeville or baseball, or else to illustrate the excellence and righteousness of his moral theory and his political practice.

The women are more sensitive and flexible and curious,

They have more leisure to cultivate their inner lives and little opportunity to eliminate what they hold to be their less worthy impulses through action. Hence little flames of rebellion flicker among them here and there; in the co-educational colleges they are the teacher's only consolation and hope. But they are, quite naturally, intensely loyal to their men on whom their economic and psychical dependence is complete, and thus their playing with the ardors and awakenings of art remains mere playing. In the sphere of personal morality their absolutism is even more passionate and intolerant on account of the unparallelled intensity of their sense of possession in their men in the relations of both motherhood and marriage. To exclude from literature all searchings of the moral life is as necessary to their comfortable optimism as the exclusion of economic and political truth is to that of their husbands. The wide-spread prosperity among our middle classes, moreover, makes both sexes always more eager to maintain in all things the *status quo;* they have a profound sense of the inner coherence of their system of life and the eternal and troubling veracities of art are subtly connected, in their minds, with the loss of money and motor-cars and with the manners of the proletariat. The poverty of poets, legendary and real, discredits their utterances before the tribunal of the respectable mind. . . .

To all these tendencies our universities, rich and powerful and supposedly free, should offer a counterweight. In their organization literature, especially the literature of the native tongue, is not inadequately represented. But organizations are also cages; the men who live in them contentedly cannot help us. The winged creatures are silenced or crushed. . . . The American university professor has often been represented as the dry-as-dust product of a foreign method of scholarship. He is not that. Especially in the departments of English the average man is usually a poor scholar. The test and strain of profound research and stringent accuracy in a given field of knowledge—which belongs no less than love and prayer and need among the major experiences of the human spirit—is precisely the

thing he has so often missed. Nor has he, as a university professor once wrote to me with a touch of pharisaism, a passion for literature. Thus his words and influences have neither authority nor charm. He is usually a cultivated gentleman with a taste for letters. He knows something of the minor Elizabethans and regards the renaissance as the proper field of study. He tends to be shy of the eighteenth century with its inexpugnable virility of mood; he dwells, among the romantics, on the innocent Keats and the old, God-fearing Wordsworth, reads Lamb and neglects Hazlitt and hastens to the Victorian haven of the mind. He is a mighty man in the "philosophy" of Browning, a connoisseur —with fine pride—among Meredith's fair women; he admires Tennyson as much for his sentiments as for the Vergilian beauty of his verse. If our friend is under forty-five he will be learned in the technique of Kipling's structure and Stevenson's style; if he affects the breezy attitude of academic unbending, he is a great admirer of O. Henry. Crushed as he commonly is by poverty, by obedience to the administration and—unless married to a rich wife—by social subserviency, he relates none of his human sufferings or impulses to literature, but remains a dealer in "rhetoric" and "technique"; he is always a little deprecatory, in his chosen field of study, of anything akin to that cry of the heart which good form forbids him to utter or to the nakedness of life's sorrows which he must decently drape to insure the respect of his colleagues and the tolerance of his administrative chiefs. Thus he, too, partly by nature and partly by the force of circumstances, helps to deepen the division between art and life and supports the common delusion that literature is an amusement, an adornment or, at best, a confirmation and illustration of the fixed principles and usages of the social group in which he lives.

3

Not a few strong and ardent spirits, recognizing the literary barrenness that surrounds us in the midst of apparent plenty, have bravely labored for better things. Their efforts

have been almost vain for reasons which they have rarely grasped. It is not one kind of technique rather than another that will save us; it matters little whether we write in free verse or fixed. The fate and character of literature, as the fate and character of all art, rests upon the relation which it sustains to life in the consciousness of men. No literary reforms can reform literature; no written programme of protest will avail. Wherever the fundamental conception of life is artificial and militantly rigid, wherever, in a word, there is a dominant orthodoxy, political, moral and economic, it follows that the free play of the literary intelligence will be neglected or suppressed. In the Middle Ages an heterodox book was placed upon the Index Expurgatorius or burned by the common hangman. Among us it is declared unmailable by the Post Office or destroyed by the Society for the Suppression of Vice. In both cases the significance of the suppression resides in its saddening conformity with the immediate reactions of the average man. It is on this point that the very young liberal is apt to be deceived. It is useless to set books free until minds are set free. Bertrand Russell's "Justice in Wartime" inspires the same contempt in your neighbor that it does in Mr. Burleson; Dreiser's "Genius" arouses the same horror mixed with impotent envy in him that it does in the nerves of Anthony Comstock's successor.

I have used the word rigid to describe the attitude to life so hostile to literature. To that word the careful thinker will always return. The common verbiage of the day has it, to be sure, that the best type of American is, above all, "progressive" and "forward-looking." But what that gentleman means by progress is more and more of what he already has—bigger business, higher efficiency, tighter organization: what he looks forward to is wider control of trade, more influence for the institutions that already engage his interest. And as he realizes his ideal of progress more and more, his inner rigidness and self-righteous intolerance increase and he and all his tribe regard with a mounting dislike and lurking fear all books that do not glorify him and his ways. The mediaeval oligarch believed in hell and knew

that the saints walked with God; his spiritual armor was never wholly impenetrable to the poet's or the mystic's warning cry. The progressive, American business man knows that he himself walks blamelessly with patriotism and prosperity and so the poet sinks to the level of the fool who is whipped from the sunlight when his quips no longer flatter and amuse.

Thus literature—since writers must live—is forced to deny its soul. It must betray all life for one pitiful but noisy form of life and restrict the range of its visions to that of its public bread-givers. It becomes a worthless, crippled and artificial thing—a timid homily or a mild decoration. The rebellion of vivid personalities is futile. The magazines cannot, in self-defence, startle and affront their readers—one or two publishers will print the books of the free spirit with a sad self-abnegation and an assurance that the profits will be less than nothing. And, the world being what it is, the seer and seeker after new forms of life through art, watching the modest but very real prosperity of his brothers in every European country is galled by the income of every swimmer with the turbid stream.

Our loss is incalculable. In every country of modern Europe—even latterly in England—literature is felt, clearly or obscurely, to be a part of that total life process which strives toward an ever freer, more varied self-realization. Every intelligent European, irrespective of class, seeks to wring from the totality of his experience some view of the world, some reaction toward the push of things that shall give coherence to his personal life and inner harmony and the power rationally to be and to endure. In that totality of experience, literature plays a tremendous part. For it is the record, irrespective of form and kind, of other and more seeing souls concerned in the same conflict with themselves and with circumstance—in the same effort, whether it succeed or fail, to shape their personalities and re-create their world. Thus men go to books not—Heaven forbid—for instruction, but for warmth and light, for a thousand new perceptions that struggle inarticulately within themselves, for the enlargement of their experience, the echo of their

discords and the companionship of beauty and terror for their troubled souls.

In this view, apparently so closely personal, literature exercises its true social functions. For all personal things are, in the finer sense, social things, if by society we mean a voluntary association of free men. Literature is anti-social when it confirms the rigidness of moral and economic formulæ, inflames the tribal passions and retards the process of psychical differentiation among men. Thus the drama which, from its very nature, must appeal to a crowd, finds it always most difficult to be civilized and a country's living stage-literature is a searching test of its people's intellectual freedom.

To put the matter more plainly and broadly: a civilized man reads books not to find in them the illustration of a ready-made theory of living which has his antecedent approval, nor that shallow emotional stimulus to his public morality which is known as "uplift"; nor, finally, the optimism that comes from seeing things as they are not. He goes to literature for life, for more life and keener life, for life as it crystallizes into higher articulateness and deeper significance. His own experience is limited and he desires to enlarge it; it is turbid and he seeks to clarify it. The enlargement and clarification of men's experience, that is,—so far as all formulation is not futile—the function of literature.

Literature, so used, will not make men "better," that is, more assiduous in the uncritical practice of a standardized morality, nor more given to the emotions deemed appropriate on public and private occasions. But it will make them wiser and, above all, deeper. For it will immeasurably heighten their consciousness of their own selves and of the other selves that fill the world. It opens the prison of the mind in which so many spirits lie in the bonds and thongs of ancient angers and in the delusions of hatred and of dread.

Its form, its varied beauty, contributes to the same end because it springs from the same source. For substance and form are in all vital work born together. Rhythmic and verbal symbols—however worthy of study for their

own sake—are to this fundamental view but the voice of that creative personality who speaks of his experience to us in tones which the impact of that experience upon him has itself brought forth. Art is one. The music of a poem is of the very stuff of its meaning; the structure of a play the very rhythm of life here symbolized and set down. There is in art, as in any form of life, no outer or inner, neither kernel nor husk but an infinite complexity moulded into dissoluble oneness.

4

It is the fashion to ask for "constructive" criticism. I can hear the pleasant American formula: "If you have nothing helpful to suggest, you had better hold your tongue." Well, understanding is itself helpful. Not many errors or delusions survive a thorough intellectual grasp of them. To reflect closely on any subject brings as its commonest reward that inner clarification which does not resist change. Our active share in producing the changes we desire is problematic enough. Conservative or liberal, authoritarian or revolutionary, we are ourselves the product of the forces we seek to direct. "For want of us the world's course will not fail," and though to counsel passivity were unwise and is, happily, useless, it may plainly be doubted whether hard thinking is not often the most fruitful form of participation in the world-process.

But from the very darkness of the moment in our American life even a mind not given to fatuous hope may infer that a reaction is at hand. Of that darkness the educational situation is a sign. The classics are being swept from our schools and colleges with a hectic speed. The last university strongholds collapsed but the other day. The war has almost eliminated German both as an intellectual and a cultural discipline. There remains, for the average pupil or student, scraps of French easily acquired and forgotten and scraps of Spanish vaguely connected in his mind with "the South American trade." His contact with the ideals of a humane culture is confined to the study of the native

tongue and literature with which, as a rule, he trifles both arrogantly and lazily only to hasten to Zane Grey and Conan Doyle. Science teaching is unrelated to philosophy, and becomes a "base, mechanic exercise." Thus the cultural poverty of the rising generation is tragic.

The humane, the expansive things of life are threatened on all sides. The driving forces of the day are seeking to erect a world that shall be hygienic and uniform, sinless and featureless, successful and dead. I shall make little of the fact that a storm is sweeping over the earth even though the breath of it is upon our faces. For the renewal must come from within, and the instinct of self-preservation in humanity of which Arnold spoke cannot be extinct in a people so numerous, so powerful and, happily, so multiform as ourselves. The day must come when a sufficient number among us will awaken to our perils—the peril of cutting ourselves off from the historic culture of mankind, the deadly peril of suppressing all the normal instincts of life except business and baseball. It is inconceivable that the American of the future is to be a Puritanic savage, ignorant of beauty, incapable of joy, building huge hives in which his bustle multiplies sterile matter, achieving swifter transit on the dreary road to business conventions and soda-water counters. . . .

The awakening American mind will hardly turn to religion except in so far as, to quote Arnold again, "its best part is its unconscious poetry." For religion is, of course, thoroughly institutionalized among us and the Churches have largely allied themselves with the brisk forces of ignorance and moral repression. The religious instinct will itself have to be born again in another and, I am tempted to say, a more Pagan embodiment. It will, at least, have to go beyond the Society for the Suppression of Vice, the Anti-Saloon League, the Lord's Day Association and the committee of business men to raise funds, and approach the spirit of One who forgave the woman taken in adultery, changed water into wine, declared the Sabbath to be made for man and drove the money-changers from the temple.

No, modern man, when he becomes aware of profound

perplexities, when he finds his will intolerably thwarted and the disharmony between himself and his world painfully acute, turns to books. And not to didactic books. It is in imaginative literature that he seeks the clarification and liberation that he needs. Even to-day the popularity of such a writer as H. G. Wells points in the inevitable direction. For, whatever the ultimate value of his books will be seen to be, it is as an energetic seeker after new forms of life, after exacter perceptions and freer moods of self-realization that he appeals to his contemporaries. His recognition of the true relation of literature to life is too eager, too conscious, too hard-won—but it is unfailing.

American books that are more than a decoration and a jest will be written when our need of them becomes sufficiently sharp and wide. Not except by a solitary martyr in an eternal cause, until then. So long as we know what is absolutely right and respectable and profitable and correct, we shall produce an endless and ignoble line of scribblers and melodramatists and our poets will take refuge in the shifting colours of their superficial moods. The works of the masters of modern literature,—of Dostoevsky and Ibsen and Hauptmann, even of Shaw and Galsworthy—are answers to a cry of spiritual need: the need for truth and liberation. Not until that cry arises among us will a master appear.

—*Literature and Life.*

II

A NOTE ON TRAGEDY

IT HAS been said many times, and always with an air of authority, that there is no tragedy in the modern drama. And since tragedy, in the minds of most educated people, is hazily but quite firmly connected with the mishaps of noble and mythical personages, the statement has been widely accepted as true. Thus very tawdry Shakespearean revivals are received with a traditional reverence for the sternest and noblest of all the art-forms that is consciously withheld from "Ghosts" or "Justice" or "The Weavers." Placid people in college towns consider these plays painful. They hasten to

pay their respects to awkward chantings of Gilbert Murray's Swinburnian verses and approve the pleasant mildness of the pity and terror native to the Attic stage. The very innocuousness of these entertainments as well as the pain that Ibsen and Hauptmann inflict should give them pause. Pity and terror are strong words and stand for strong things. But our public replies in the comfortable words of its most respectable critics that tragedy has ceased to be written.

These critics reveal a noteworthy state of mind. They are aware that tragedy cuts to the quick of life and springs from the innermost depth of human thinking because it must always seek to deal in some intelligible way with the problem of evil. But since it is most comfortable to believe that problem to have been solved, they avert their faces from a reopening of the eternal question and declare that the answer of the Greeks and the Elizabethans is final. They are also aware, though more dimly, that all tragedy involves moral judgments. And since they are unaccustomed to make such judgments, except by the light of standards quite rigid and quite antecedent to experience, they are bewildered by a type of tragic drama that transfers its crises from the deeds of men to the very criteria of moral judgment, from guilt under a law to the arraignment of the law itself.

"Macbeth" represents in art and life their favorite tragic situation. They can understand a gross and open crime meeting a violent punishment. When, as in "King Lear," the case is not so plain, they dwell long and emphatically on the old man's weaknesses in order to find satisfaction in his doom. In the presence of every tragic protagonist of the modern drama they are tempted to play the part of Job's comforters. They are eager to impute to him an absoluteness of guilt which shall, by implication, justify their own moral world and the doctrine of moral violence by which they live. The identical instinct which in war causes men to blacken the enemy's character in order to justify their tribal rage and hate, persuades the conventional critic to deny the character of tragedy to every action in which disaster does not follow upon crime. Yet, rightly looked upon, man in every tragic situation is a Job, incapable and

unconscious of any degree of voluntary guilt that can justify a suffering as sharp and constant as his own.

Thus modern tragedy does not deal with wrong and just vengeance, which are both, if conceived absolutely, pure fictions of our deep-rooted desire for superiority and violence. It is inspired by compassion. But compassion without complacency is still, alas, a very rare emotion. And it seeks to derive the tragic element in human life from the mistakes and self-imposed compulsions, not from the sins, of men. The central idea of "Ghosts," for instance, is not concerned with the sin of the father that is visited upon the son. It is concerned, as Ibsen sought to make abundantly clear, with Mrs. Alving's fatal conformity to a social tradition that did not represent the pureness of her will. Her tragic mistake arises from her failure to break the law. The ultimate and absolute guilt is in the blind, collective lust of mankind for the formulation and indiscriminate enforcement of external laws.

To such a conception of the moral world, tragedy has but recently attained. That both the critical and the public intelligence should lag far behind is inevitable. Every morning's paper proclaims a world whose moral pattern is formed of terrible blacks and glaring whites. How should people gladly endure the endless and pain-touched gray of modern tragedy? They understand the Greek conception of men who violated the inscrutable will of gods; they understand the renaissance conception that a breach of the universal moral law, sanctioned and set forth by God, needed to be punished. They can even endure such situations as that of Claudio and Isabella in the terrible third act of "Measure for Measure." For that unhappy brother and sister never question the right of the arbitrary power that caused so cruel a dilemma, nor doubt the absolute validity of the virtue that is named. These two strike at each other's hearts and never at the bars of the monstrous cage that holds them prisoner. Do they not, therefore, rise almost to the dignity of symbols of that moral world in which the majority of men still live?

But it is precisely with the bars of the cage that modern

tragedy is so largely and necessarily concerned. It cannot deal with guilt in the older sense. For guilt involves an absolute moral judgment. That, in its turn, involves an absolute standard. And a literally absolute standard is unthinkable without a super-human sanction. Even such a sanction, however, would leave the flexible and enlightened spirit in the lurch. For if it were not constantly self-interpretative by some method of progressive and objectively embodied revelation, its interpretation would again become a mere matter of human opinion, and the absoluteness of moral guilt would again be gravely jeopardized. Not only must God have spoken; He would need to speak anew each day. The war has overwhelmingly illustrated how infinitely alien such obvious reflections still are to the temper of humanity. We must have guilt. Else how, without utter shame, could we endure punitive prisons and gibbets and battles? Is it surprising that audiences are cold to Ibsen and Hauptmann and Galsworthy, and that good critics who are also righteous and angry men deny their plays the character of tragedy?

But the bars of the absolutist cage are not so bright and firm as they were once. The conception of unrelieved guilt and overwhelming vengeance has just played on the stage of history a part so monstrous that its very name will ring to future ages with immitigable contrition and grief. And thus in the serener realm of art the modern idea of tragedy is very sure to make its gradual appeal to the hearts of men. Guilt and punishment will be definitely banished to melodrama, where they belong. Tragedy will seek increasingly to understand our failures and our sorrows. It will excite pity for our common fate; the terror it inspires will be a terror lest we wrong our brother or violate his will, not lest we share his guilt and incur his punishment. It will seek its final note of reconciliation not by delivering another victim to an outraged God or an angry tribe, but through a profound sense of that community of human suffering which all force deepens and all freedom assuages.

—*The Nation.* (*Vol. CVIII, No. 2813.*)

FRANCIS HACKETT

THE SICKBED OF CULTURE

THE newspaper made breakfast rosy. Oats were steady. The coffee market had rallied. Linen was moving better. Lard and ribs were easier. But in the late afternoon I bought the *Atlantic Monthly* and thereupon came to behold the seamy side of this, our mortal adventure. A reactionary tendency, it appears, has developed in the realm of the spirit. There is a sag in culture. Culture is slowly but hideously being extirpated from our midst. The Extirpation of Culture is the very legend of the composition that details our shame. As if it were a weed, a heresy, an abnormal growth, culture is being rooted out and destroyed. Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Come, sweaty varlets, scriveners, senators, vestrymen, chirurgeons, chymists, draymen, ironmongers and suchlike! Awake to the crisis. Attend to the disgrace and peril of our state.

It is a woman who appears with bitten visage from the sickbed of culture. Ordinarily she refrains from speaking of these things to the gross multitude. She "habitually says nothing to the professional optimists in the public square." But there is a time when the worst must be faced. And it is in this mood of chilled yet passionate reproach that our lady Agoraphobia fetches us to the shaded chamber of the culture we are doing to death. Culture, poor dear, "contact with the best that has been said and thought in the world," has had a time in the vulgar jostle of modernity. As an image of this refinement (not as an image of this refinement's defender), imagine a fragrant New Englander, a reticule in one mitten, perhaps the odes of Sappho in the other, conscious that she is the "disciplined and finished creature," conscious that she is "intellectually exclusive,"

conscious also that "culture is inherently snobbish," being asked to fight her passage into a metropolitan subway. "Step lively!" The imperative jars the lady. She gingerly boards the train. On the platform there is contact, but it is not precisely "contact with the best that has been said and thought in the world." Do you wonder, seeing her chaste bonnet somewhat tipsy, her lips compressed, an alarming color tinging her marmoreal cheeks, that Barrett Wendell emits a tiny squeal of pain, that Edith Wharton rolls an eye to heaven, that the shades of Pater and Matthew Arnold flutter unhappily? New England culture is laid between sheets with nothing but the Atlantic for hot-water bottle.

And who is to blame for this prostration of our precious culture? The gross multitude. Once culture had seclusion. The social scheme did not allow intrusive minions. "Still less would the conception of the public intellect have admitted the notion. Every one was not supposed to be congenitally qualified for intimacy with the best that has been said and thought in the world." But now, mainly due to "the increased hold of the democratic fallacy on the public mind," the slums pour forth dreadful aspirants to culture, encouraged by traitorous Brahmins; science contributes its stinking acid-stained barbarians; pragmatic philosophers take away the guardian standards of beauty and truth. The angry daughter of the Brahmins descends to slang, the expletive of the continent, in her rage at the invasion. "Science is on top." "The classics are back numbers." We are "overrun by the hordes of ignorance and materialism." Our children sip English from the founts defiled by the poor, "an active and discontented majority, with hands that pick and steal."

Belonging to the upper classes, as she confesses, this gifted prosecutor is certainly entitled to our sympathy. For conceive, she is experiencing in her degree the loneliness of God. Looking down on the inimical multitude she suffers the pangs of isolation. "I begin to think," she observes sadly, "that our age does not really care about perfection." But since "culture must always be in the hands of an oli-

garchy," perhaps a voice de profundis might be raised to the heights. It is quite permissible, even if the monitor herself is unfortunate enough to use the German word "kultur" like an ignoramus, to be decidedly severe about the bumptious ignorance of the masses. It is quite permissible to argue that upper-class people are "apt" to arrive through riches at the æsthetic truths. But a passion for exclusiveness, a belief in the restriction of cultural susceptibility to the well-nurtured, is all to no purpose if she permits outsiders to come up like flowers. The worst handicaps of the neglected culture over which she wrings her fair hands is not "the materialism of all classes," "the influx of a racially and socially inferior population," "the idolatry of science." It is its supersession by another culture to which orthodox culture has not the clue.

To prevent this rivalry there should be a most vigilant campaign against every new human expression. That is the best way to keep the oligarchy entrenched. If the ignorant foreigners "immigrants who bring no personal traditions," come from countries of oppression, she must decline to believe that they had a literature and a culture. There is only one culture, our own. Perhaps in steerage you can evoke noises from a Lithuanian that sound like human speech. Yes, but soon that Lithuanian will have "the locutions of the slum." Beware of Lithuania. Do not pat the strange dog. He might bite a piece out of your culture. What if the young Jewess on the immigrant ship glows with assent when, without Russian or Yiddish or German, you query: Dostoevsky? Gogol? Tchekov? Lermontov? Tolstoy? Schnitzler? Sudermann? Artzibashef? Ibsen? Strindberg? It is not conversation. It is mere fraternal intercourse through modernity's names. The suppression of such names is the first great necessity of a pinhead conception of culture. And what of Poles and Spaniards and Italians and Scandinavians? What of Constantine Meunier thrusting Walloons into culture? And H. G. Wells with his counter-jumpers and Bennett with his human inch-worms, merely keeping the earth fertile, and Shaw with that dreadful winnowing fan in his head? These things must be stopped.

Upstairs in the Brahmin mansion there is a delicate lady, disturbed by modernity. She hates pathology and economics. She hates that science which "challenged the supereminence of religion." She honestly cared for things of the spirit, attempted no royal road to salvation. For her comfort it is required that democracy, science, industrialism, suspend their evolutions. It is a good deal to ask, perhaps, but she asks in the name of beauty and moral imagination. These, she takes it, she has loved above all others. It is not her fault if she insists with tight acidity. She hates crowds. She is confined within. She cannot take the air.

—*Horizons.*

VAN WYCK BROOKS

I

AN EXTERNAL CIVILIZATION

I THINK we are driven to the conclusion that our life is, on all its levels, in a state of arrested development, that it has lost, if indeed it has ever possessed, the principle of growth.

To the general sense of this many of the main documents in our recent literature bear witness. Consider, for example, those vast literary pyramids of Mr. Theodore Dreiser, those prodigious piles of language built of the commonest rubble and cohering, in the absence of any architectural design, by sheer virtue of their weight and size. Mr. Dreiser's Titans and Financiers and Geniuses are not even the approximations of men in a world of men—they are monsters, blindly effectuating themselves, or failing to effectuate themselves, in a primeval chaos; and the world wears them and wearies them as it wears and wearies the beasts of the field, leaving them as immature in age as it found them in youth. Cowperwood, the financier, put in prison as a result of his piratical machinations, weaves chair-bottoms and marks time spiritually against the day of his release, when he snaps back into his old self absolutely unaltered by reflection: and of Eugene Witla, after he has passed through seven hundred and thirty-four pages of soul-searing adventure, Mr. Dreiser is able to enquire: "Was he not changed then? Not much, no. Only hardened intellectually and emotionally, tempered for life and work." Puppets as they are of an insensate force which has never been transmitted into those

finer initiatives that shed light on human destiny, they are insulated against human values; love and art pass into and out of their lives like things of so little meaning that any glimmer of material opportunity outshines them; and therefore they are able to speak to us only of the vacuity of life, telling us that human beings are as the flies of summer.

And then there is the *Spoon River Anthology*. The immense and legitimate vogue of this book is due to its unerring diagnosis of what we all recognize, when we are confronted with it, as the inner life of the typical American community when the criterion of humane values is brought to bear upon it in place of the criterion of material values with which we have traditionally pulled the wool over our eyes. It is quite likely, of course, that Mr. Masters, with a reasonable pessimism, has exaggerated the suicidal and murderous tendencies of the Spoon Riverites. But I know that he conveys an extraordinarily just and logical impression. He pictures a community of some thousands of souls every one of whom lives in a spiritual isolation as absolute as that of any lone farmer on the barren prairie, a community that has been utterly unable to spin any sort of spiritual fabric common to all, which has for so many generations cherished and cultivated its animosity toward all those non-utilitarian elements in the human heart that retard the successful pursuit of the main chance that it has reduced itself to a spiritual desert in which nothing humane is able to find rootage and grow at all. And yet all the types that shed glory on humankind have existed in that, as in every community! They have existed, or at least they have been born. They have put forth one green shoot only to wither and decay because all the moisture has evaporated out of the atmosphere that envelops them. Poets, painters, philosophers, men of science and religion, are all to be found, stunted, starved, thwarted, embittered, prevented from taking even the first step in self-development, in this amazing microcosm of our society, a society that stagnates for want of leadership, and at the same time, incurably suspicious of the very idea of leadership, saps away all those vital elements that produce the leader.

For that is the vicious circle in which we revolve. In the absence both of an intellectual tradition and a sympathetic soil, we who above all peoples need great men and great ideals have been unable to develop the latent greatness we possess and have lost an incalculable measure of greatness that has, in spite of all, succeeded in developing itself. For one thing, we have lost an army of gifted minds, of whom Henry James and Whistler are only the most notorious examples, minds about which our intellectual life could have rallied to its infinite advantage, as it always does when born leaders are in the field.

But the loss, great and continuing as it is, of so many talents that we have repelled and poured out, talents that have been driven to an exotic development in other countries, is really nothing beside what we have lost in ways that are perhaps less obvious. We are the victims of a systematic process of inverse selection so far as the civilizing elements in the American nature are concerned. Our ancestral faith in the individual and what he is able to accomplish (or, in modern parlance, to "put over") as the measure of all things has despoiled us of that instinctive human reverence for those divine reservoirs of collective experience, religion, science, art, philosophy, the self-subordinating service of which is almost the measure of the highest happiness. In consequence of this our natural capacities have been dissipated; they have become ego-centric and socially centrifugal and they have hardened and become fixed in the most anomalous forms. The religious energy of the race, instead of being distilled and quintessentialized into the finer inspirations of human conduct, has escaped in a vast vapor that is known under a hundred names. So also our scientific energy has been diverted from the study of life to the immediacies of practical invention, our philosophy, quite forgetting that its function is to create values of life, has oscillated between a static idealism and a justification of all the anæmic tendencies of an anæmic age, and our art and literature, oblivious of the soul of man, have established themselves on a superficial and barren technique.

Of all this individualism is at once the cause and the

result. For it has prevented the formation of a collective spiritual life in the absence of which the individual, having nothing greater than himself to subordinate himself to, is either driven into the blind alley of his appetites or rides some hobby of his own invention until it falls to pieces from sheer craziness. Think of the cranks we have produced! Not the mere anonymous cranks one meets, six to a block, in every American village, but the eminent cranks, and even the preëminent cranks, the Thoreaus and Henry Georges, men who might so immensely more have enriched our spiritual heritage had we been capable of assimilating their minds, nurturing and disciplining them out of their aberrant individualism. For every member of the vast army of American cranks has been the graveyard of some "happy thought," some thought happier than his neighbors have had and which has turned sour in his brain because the only world he has known has had no use for it. As for our literature, it is quite plain that there is nothing inherently "greater" in many of the writers whose work we import (and rightly import) from abroad than in writers of a corresponding order at home. The former simply have been able to make a better use of their talents owing to the complicated system of critical and traditional forces perpetually at play about them.

For only where art and thought and science organically share in the vital essential programme of life can the artist and the thinker and the scientist find the preliminary foothold that enables them properly to undertake their task. To state the case in its lowest terms, only under these conditions are they able to receive an adequate, intensive training along non-utilitarian lines without hopelessly crippling their chances of self-preservation; for under these conditions they know that the social fabric is complicated enough to employ all the faculties of their minds and that in following non-utilitarian interests they are fulfilling a recognized need of society. It is this which breeds in them the sense that they are serving something great, something so generally felt to be great that society rewards them with a pride calling forth their own pride, taking delight in setting

up the sort of obstacles that constantly put them on their mettle.

Without these conditions we cannot have great leaders; without leaders we cannot have a great society. If this suggests the hope of a "national culture" to come it is only in order that America may be able in the future to give something to the rest of the world that is better than what the world too generally means by "Americanism." For two generations the most sensitive minds in Europe—Renan, Ruskin, Nietzsche, to name none more recent—have summed up their mistrust of the future in that one word; and it is because, altogether externalized ourselves, we have typified the universally externalizing influences of modern industrialism. The shame of this is a national shame, and one that the war, with all the wealth it has brought us, has infinately accentuated. And it covers a national problem—the problem of creating objects of loyalty within the nation by virtue of which the springs of our creative energy are not only touched into play but so economized as to be able to irrigate the entire subsoil of our national life.

—*Letters and Leadership.*

II

THE FEAR OF EXPERIENCE

How can our literature be anything but impotent? It is inevitably so, since it springs from a national mind that has been sealed against that experience from which literature derives all its values.

How true this is can be seen from almost any of its enunciations of principle, especially on the popular, that is to say the frankest, level. I open, for instance, one of our so-called better-class magazines and fall upon a character-sketch of William Gillette: "What a word! *Forget!* What a feat! What a faculty! Lucky the man who can himself forget. How gifted the one who can make others forget. It is the triumph of the art of William Gillette that in the magic of his spell an audience forgets." Opening another magazine I turn to a reported interview in which a well-

known, popular poet expatiates on his craft. "Modern life," he tells us, "is full of problems, complex and difficult, and the man who concentrates his mind on his problems all day doesn't want to concentrate it on tediously obscure poetry at night. The newspaper poets are forever preaching the sanest optimism, designed for the people who really need the influence of optimism—the breadwinners, the weary, the heavy-laden. That's the kind of poetry the people want, and the fact that they want it shows that their hearts and heads are all right."

Here are two typical pronouncements of the American mind, one on the art of acting, one on the art of poetry, and they unite in expressing a perfectly coherent doctrine. This doctrine is that the function of art is to turn aside the problems of life from the current of emotional experience and create in its audience a condition of cheerfulness that is not organically derived from experience but added from the outside. It assumes that experience is not the stuff of life but something essentially meaningless; and not merely meaningless but an obstruction which retards and complicates our real business of getting on in the world and getting up in the world, and which must, therefore, be ignored and forgotten and evaded and beaten down by every means in our power.

What is true on the popular level is not less true on the level of serious literature, in spite of everything our most conscientious artists have been able to do. Thirty years ago an acute English critic remarked, apropos of a novel by Mr. Howells, that our novelists seemed to regard the Civil War as an occurrence that separated lovers, not as something that ought normally to have colored men's whole thoughts on life. And it is true that if we did not know how much literature has to be discounted, we could hardly escape the impression, for all the documents which have come down to us, that our grandfathers really did pass through the war without undergoing the purgation of soul that is often said to justify the workings of tragic mischance in human affairs. Mr. Howells has himself given us the *comédie humaine* of our post-bellum society, Mr. Howells

whose whole aim was to measure the human scope of that society and who certainly far less than any other novelist of his time falsified his vision of reality in the interests of popular entertainment. Well, we know the sort of society Mr. Howells pictured and how he pictured it. He has himself explicitly stated, in connection with certain Russian novels, that Americans in general do not undergo the varieties of experience that Russian fiction records, that "the more smiling aspects of life" are "the more American," and that in being true to our "well-to-do actualities" the American novelist does all that can be expected of him. Could one ask for a more essential declaration of artistic bankruptcy than that?

For what does it amount to, this declaration? It identifies the reality of the artist's vision with what is accepted as reality in the world about him. But every one knows that the sketchiest, the most immature, the most trivial society is just as susceptible as any other of the most profound artistic reconstruction; all that is required is an artist capable of penetrating beneath it. The great artist floats the visible world on the sea of his imagination and measures it not according to its own scale of values but according to the values that he has himself derived from his descent into the abysses of life. What, then, is amiss with our writers? They are victims of the universal taboo which the ideal of material success, of the acquisitive life, has placed upon experience. It matters not at all that they have no part or lot in this ideal, that they are men of the finest artistic conscience. In the first place, from their earliest childhood they are taught to repress everything that conflicts with the material welfare of their environment; in the second place, their environment is itself so denatured, so stripped of everything that might nourish the imagination, that they do not so much mature at all as externalize themselves in a world of externalities. Unable to achieve a sufficiently active consciousness of themselves to return upon their environment and overthrow it and dissolve it and recreate it in the terms of a personal vision, they gradually come to accept it on its own terms. If Boston is their

theme, they become Bostonian; if it is the Yukon, they become "abysmal brutes"; if it is nature, nature becomes the hero of their work; and if it is machinery, the machines themselves become vocal and express their natural contempt for a humanity that is incapable, either morally or artistically, of putting them in their place and keeping them there.

We know how this occurred with Mr. Howells. "It seemed to me then, and for a good while afterward," he writes in "Literary Friends and Acquaintances," apropos of his first reception by the Boston Olympians of the sixties, "that a person who had seen the men and had the things said before him that I had in Boston, could not keep himself too carefully in cotton; and this was what I did all the following winter, though, of course, it was a secret between me and me." Never, assuredly, in any other society, has literary hero-worship taken quite the complexion of that; for the statement is accurately true. Such was the prestige of Boston and the pundits of Boston that Mr. Howells, having cast his anchor in its lee, never felt the necessity of exploring, on his own account, beyond the spacious, quiet harbor of life that presented itself to the cultivated New England eye. The result can be seen in such novels as "A Modern Instance," the tragedy of which is viewed not from the angle of an experience that is wider and deeper, as the experience of a great novelist always is, than that of any character the novelist's imagination is able to conceive, but from the angle of Ben Halleck, the epitome of Boston's best public opinion. Boston passes judgment, and Mr. Howells concurs; and you close the book feeling that you have seen life not through the eye of a free personality but of a highly conventional community at a given epoch.

It is exactly the same, to ignore a thousand incidental distinctions, in the work of Jack London. Between the superman of European fiction and Jack London's superman there is all the difference that separates an ideal achieved in the mind of the writer and a fact accepted from the world outside him; all the difference, in short, that separates the truth of art from the appearance of life. If these, therefore, among the freshest and most original talents our fiction

has known since Hawthorne's day, have been absorbed in an atmosphere which no one has ever been able to condense, is it remarkable that the rank and file have slipped and fallen, that they have never learned to stand upright and possess themselves? Is it remarkable that they sell themselves out at the first bid, that they dress out their souls in the ready-made clothes the world offers them?

Such, in fact, is the deficiency of personal impulse, of the creative will, in America, so overwhelming is the demand laid upon Americans to serve ulterior and impersonal ends, that it is as if the springs of spiritual action had altogether evaporated. Launched in a society where individuals and their faculties appear only to pass away, almost wholly apart from and without acting upon one another, our writers find themselves enveloped in an impalpable atmosphere that acts as a perpetual dissolvent to the whole field of reality both within and without themselves, an atmosphere that invades every sphere of life and takes its discount from everything that they can do, an atmosphere that prevents the formation of oases of reality in the universal chaos. Is it remarkable that they take refuge in the abstract, the non-human, the impersonal, in the "bigness" of the phenomenal world, in the surface values of "local color," and in the "social conscience," which enables them to do so much good by writing badly that they often come to think of artistic truth itself as an enemy of progress?

—*Letters and Leadership.*

III

THE UNPRACTICAL CRITICS

It is certainly remarkable this apparently general determination not to be practical on the part of so many dissimilar minds; and it is all the more remarkable because criticism has ever been, in other countries, precisely the most practical of the literary arts. Since the days when Socrates, its august founder, sat in the market-place and played the midwife to so many inarticulate minds, it has been the joyous prerogative of criticism to be on the spot when thoughts

are being born. Not to mention any names that the most academic of our critics can possibly gainsay, is it not the glory of Lessing that he established a sort of norm of the German character, descending into the thick of reality and building, by creation and controversy alike, amid the shifting sands of pedantry and exoticism, an impregnable base for the superstructure of a civilization to come? As for Sainte-Beuve, he lived in an age and a society that required no such drastic re-statements of fundamental truth; he inherited and perpetuated that marvelous equilibrium of the French temper which is the result of an organic culture founded on the suffrages of the whole race; but Sainte-Beuve lived and wrote in substantial harmony with the creative life of his contemporaries, and he, too, was ever ready to spring to the defence of new-born thoughts and fight for their just rights of passage into the French mind. No doubt in the France of Sainte—Beuve there were more new-born thoughts worth fighting for, strictly as thoughts, than there are in the America of to-day. But no one denies that at present in this country an immense amount of creative energy has at least conclusively turned itself toward the field of the arts. If it does not in many instances come rightly and fully to a head, if it fails very often to eventuate in thoughts in themselves vitally important, does it not all the more behoove criticism to condense the vapors that confuse this creative energy and to spring loyally to the support of groping minds that bear the mark of sincerity and promise? As for our critics, what birth out of life have any of them ever defended with that heavy artillery they so enjoy training upon those popular American fallacies many of which, quite plainly, are the result of their own immoral absentee-mindedness? Have they ever been at pains to grasp the contemporary American mind and its problems, to discover what the contemporary American mind is, and what it is capable of, and how it can best be approached, and whether it is able to assimilate the whole culture of the world before it has formed any personal conception of what culture is?

Our critics, if they are in touch with European life, must be aware that the relation in which they stand to the life of

their own country is quite unique. But far even from considering the idea that the living forces about them deserve a little sympathetic and discreet attention they seem to be persuaded that the younger generation presents a united front against everything that mankind has tried and found worthy, and that it has formed a sort of conspiracy to propagate falsehood at whatever cost. "What Matthew Arnold would call 'the elephantine main body,'" says Mr. Babbitt, "seems more convinced than ever that man, to become perfect, has only to continue indefinitely the programme of the nineteenth century—that is, to engage in miscellaneous expansion and back it up if need be with noisy revolt against all the forms of the past." To which Mr. Brownell subjoins the following: "Every one who sympathetically 'belongs' to [the age] feels himself stanchly supported by the consensus of all it esteems. . . . The militancy of the age therefore finds itself not only in possession of a perfectly definite—if mainly destructive—credo, but of a practically united and enthusiastic army."

To us who are so much in the thick of things that we cannot see the forest for the trees, statements of this kind are all but unintelligible. They seem to us like anathemas delivered in some half-forgotten sacred language to a people that has begun to stammer in a vernacular of its own. We are so conscious of our own differences, of the hundred and one programmes that we are pursuing precisely *not* in common, that while we are prepared for body-blows from Mr. Babbitt (to whose vigorous intellect, by the way, many of us are greatly indebted), we scarcely know what to make of Mr. Brownell's rather more graciously delivered thrusts. But we may be very sure that if, to the older generation, we appear to be a "practically united and enthusiastic army" we must be so in some sense in which the older generation is not. To what that sense is our critics themselves in a general way have given us the clue. They say that we are emotional, and they give to their accusation an air of plausibility by adding that we are over-emotional, as indeed we are; but what they really object to is that we are emotional at all, the strength of their own case resting wholly on the

assumption that literature ought to spring not from the emotions but from the intellect. This we deny, and I suppose that our denial is so unanimous that it does, in a way, neutralize our intellectual differences. But why do we deny it? Partly because our reaction upon life, on the one hand, and our reading of the history of literature, on the other, lead us to believe that it is false; and partly because we have witnessed the failure and breakdown of intellectualism itself.

—*Letters and Leadership.*

RANDOLPH BOURNE

A LITERARY RADICAL

. . . The older critics had long since disavowed the intention of discriminating among current writers. These men, who had to have an Academy to protect them, lumped the younger writers of verse and prose together as "anarchic" and "naturalistic," and had become, in these latter days, merely peevish and querulous, protesting in favor of standards that no longer represented our best values. Every one, in Miro's time, bemoaned the lack of critics, but the older critics seemed to have lost all sense of hospitality and to have become tired and a little spitefully disconsolate, while the newer ones were too intent on their crusades against puritanism and philistinism to have time for a constructive pointing of the way.

Miro had a very real sense of standing at the end of an era. He and his friends had lived down both their old orthodoxies of the classics and their new orthodoxies of propaganda. Gone were the priggishness and self-consciousness which had marked their teachers. The new culture would be more personal than the old, but it would not be held as a personal property. It would be democratic in the sense that it would represent each person's honest spontaneous taste. The old attitude was only speciously democratic. The assumption was that if you pressed your material long enough and winningly enough upon your culturable public, they would acquire it. But the material was something handed down, not grown in the garden of their own appreciations. Under these conditions the critic and appreciator became a mere impersonal register of orthodox opinion. The cultivated person, in conforming his judgments to what was authoritatively taught him, was really a

member of the herd—a cultivated herd, it is true, but still a herd. It was the mass that spoke through the critic and not his own discrimination. These authoritative judgments might, of course, have come—probably have come— to the herd through discerning critics, but in Miro's time judgment in the schools had petrified. One believed not because one felt the original discernment, but beause one was impressed by the weight and reputability of opinion. At least so it seemed to Miro.

Now just as the artists had become tired of conventions and were breaking through into new and personal forms, so Miro saw the younger critics breaking through these cultural conventions. To the elders the result would seem mere anarchy. But Miro's attitude did not want to destroy, it merely wanted to rearrange the materials. He wanted no more second-hand appreciations. No one's cultural store was to include anything that one could not be enthusiastic about. One's acquaintance with the best that had been said and thought should be encouraged—in Miro's ideal school—to follow the lines of one's temperament. Miro, having thrown out the old gods, found them slowly and properly coming back to him. Some would always repel him, others he hoped to understand eventually. But if it took wisdom to write the great books, did it not also take wisdom to understand them? Even the Latin writers he hoped to recover, with the aid of translations. But why bother with Greek when you could get Euripides in the marvellous verse of Gilbert Murray? Miro was willing to believe that no education was complete without at least an inoculation of the virus of the two orthodoxies that he was transcending.

As Miro looked around the American scene, he wondered where the critics were to come from. He saw, on the one hand, Mr. Mencken and Mr. Dreiser and their friends, going heavily forth to battle with the Philistines, glorying in pachydermous vulgarisms that hurt the polite and cultivated young men of the old school. And he saw these violent critics, in their rage against puritanism, becoming themselves moralists, with the same bigotry and tastelessness as their enemies. No, these would never do. On the other

hand, he saw Mr. Stuart P. Sherman, in his youthful if somewhat belated ardor, revolting so conscientiously against the "naturalism" and crude expression of current efforts that, in his defense of belles-lettres, of the fine traditions of literary art, he himself became a moralist of the intensest brand, and as critic plumped for Arnold Bennett, because that clever man had a feeling for the proprieties of human conduct. No, Mr. Sherman would do even less adequately. His fine sympathies were as much out of the current as was the specious classicism of Professor Shorey. He would have to look for the critic among the young men who had an abounding sense of life, as well as a feeling for literary form. They would be men who had not been content to live on their cultural inheritance, but had gone out into the modern world and amassed a fresh fortune of their own. They would be men who were not squeamish, who did not feel the delicate differences between "animal" and "human" conduct, who were enthusiastic about Mark Twain and Gorky as well as Romain Rolland, and at the same time were thrilled by Copeau's theatre.

Where was a better programme for culture, for any kind of literary art? Culture as a living effort, a driving attempt both at sincere expression and at the comprehension of sincere expression wherever it was found! Appreciation to be as far removed from the "I know what I like!" as from the text-book impeccability of taste! If each mind sought its own along these lines, would not many find themselves agreed? Miro insisted on liking Amy Lowell's attempt to outline the tendencies in American poetry in a form which made clear the struggles of contemporary men and women with the tradition and against "every affectation of the mind." He began to see in the new class-consciousness of poets the ending of that old division which "culture" made between the chosen people and the gentiles. We were now to form little pools of workers and appreciators of similar temperaments and tastes. The little magazines that were starting up became voices for these new communities of sentiment. Miro thought that perhaps at first it was right to adopt a tentative superciliousness towards the rest of

the world, so that both Mr. Mencken with his shudders at the vulgar Demos and Mr. Sherman with his obsession with the sanely and wholesomely American might be shut out from influence. Instead of fighting the Philistine in the name of freedom, or fighting the vulgar iconoclast in the name of wholesome human notions, it might be better to write for one's own band of comprehenders, in order that one might have something genuine with which to appeal to both the mob of the "bourgeois" and the ferocious vandals who have been dividing the field among them. Far better a quarrel among these intensely self-conscious groups than the issues that have filled the *Atlantic* with their dreary obsolescence. Far better for the mind that aspired toward "culture" to be told not to conform or worship, but to search out its group, its own temperamental community of sentiment, and there deepen appreciations through sympathetic contact.

It was no longer a question of being hospitable toward the work of other countries. Miro found the whole world open to him, in these days, through the enterprise of publishers. He and his friends felt more sympathetic with certain groups in France and Russia than they did with the variegated "prominent authors" of their own land. Winston Churchill as a novelist came to seem more of an alien than Artzybachev. The fact of culture being international had been followed by a sense of its being. The old cultural attitude had been hospitable enough but it imported its alien culture in the form of "comparative literature." It was hospitable only in trying to mould its own taste to the orthodox canons abroad. The older American critic was mostly interested in getting the proper rank and reverence for what he borrowed. The new critic will take what suits his community of sentiment. He will want to link up not with the foreign canon but with that group which is nearest in spirit with the effort he and his friends are making. The American has to work to interpret and portray the life he knows. He cannot be international in the sense that anything but the life in which he is soaked with its questions and its colors, can be the material for his art. But he can

be international—and must be—in the sense that he works with a certain hopeful vision of a "young world," and with certain ideal values upon which the younger men, stained and revolted by war, in all countries are agreeing.

Miro wonders sometimes whether the direction in which he is tending will not bring him around the circle again to a new classicism. The last stage in the history of the man of culture will be that "classic" which he did not understand and which his mind spent its youth in overthrowing. But it will be a classicism far different from that which was so unintelligently handed down to him in the American world. It will be something worked out and lived into. Looking into the future he will have to do what Van Wyck Brooks calls "invent a usable past." Finding little in the American tradition that is not tainted with sweetness and light and burdened with the terrible patronage of bourgeois society, the new classicist will yet rescue Thoreau and Whitman and Mark Twain and try to tap through them a certain eternal, human tradition of abounding vitality and moral freedom, and so build out the future. If the classic means power with restraint, vitality with harmony, a fusion of intellect and feeling, and a keen sense of the artistic conscience, then the revolutionary world is coming out into the classic. When Miro sees behind the minds of "The Masses" group a desire for form and for expressive beauty, and sees the radicals following Jacques Copeau and reading Chekov, he smiles at the thought of the American critics, young and old, who do not know yet that they are dead.

—*History of a Literary Radical and Other Essays.*

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